The ZX Spectrum Book™

30th Anniversary Special

Classic games • Hardware celebrated • Studios revisited

Welcome to

The ZX Spectrum Book™

30th Anniversary Special

In many ways the Spectrum was the underdog when placed up against Commodore's C64. It was smaller, had a flimsier build, didn't make a huge impact in the United States, and had a sound chip that could best be described as adequate. And yet the Spectrum remains one of the best-loved home computers of the Eighties.

Rising phoenix-like from the ashes of Sir Clive Sinclair's ZX81, it quickly became a hit with gamers thanks to its many arcade conversions, cute design and a host of incredible games, ranging from Sabre Wulf, to Head Over Heels, Turbo Esprit and Skool Daze. Many of the UK's most important software houses, including Rare and Codemasters cut their teeth on the machine, and it was responsible for the rise of the bedroom coders, some of which feature within this very book.

With the Spectrum now celebrating its 30th year, we've taken this momentous occasion to look back and remember Sir Clive Sinclair's beloved machine. Whether you love Matthew Smith, Ultimate Play The Game, Head Over Heels or Manic Miner, you'll find plenty to enjoy inside this book.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The ZX Spectrum Book™

30th Anniversary Special

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk

Editor in Chief
Rick Porter

Editor
Darran Jones

Senior Art Editor
Danielle Dixon

Design
Annabelle Sing

Printed by
William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

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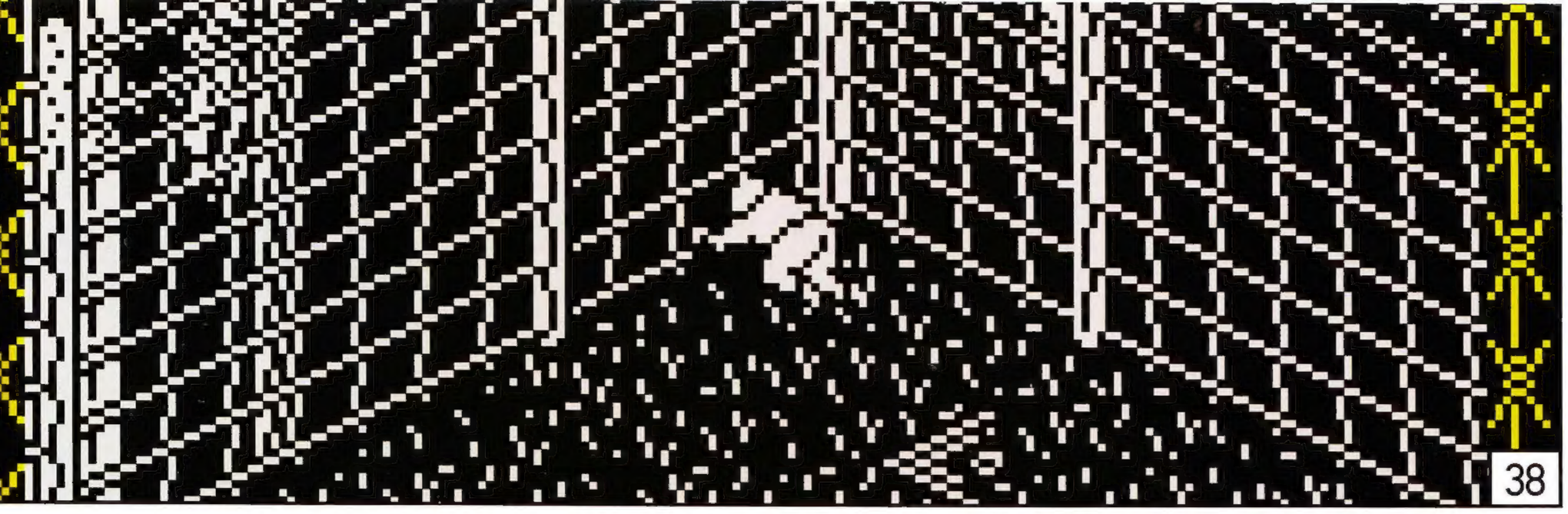
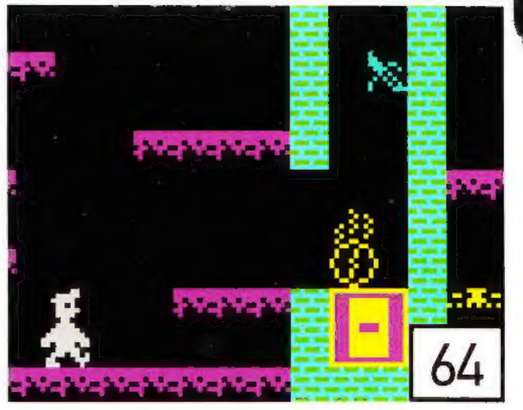
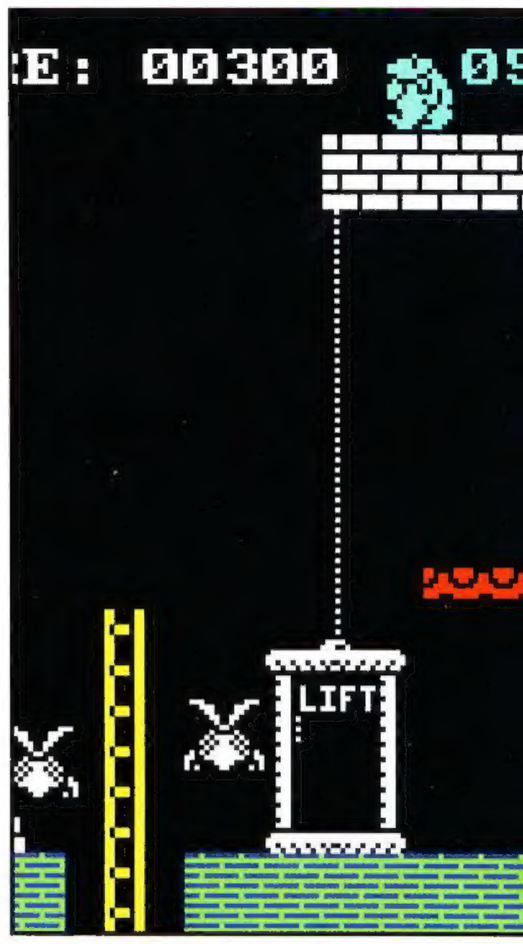
IMAGINEER OF THE YEAR
DANIELLE DIXON

IMAGINE PUBLISHING

TEAM OF THE YEAR
BOOKAZINES







The
ZX Spectrum Book
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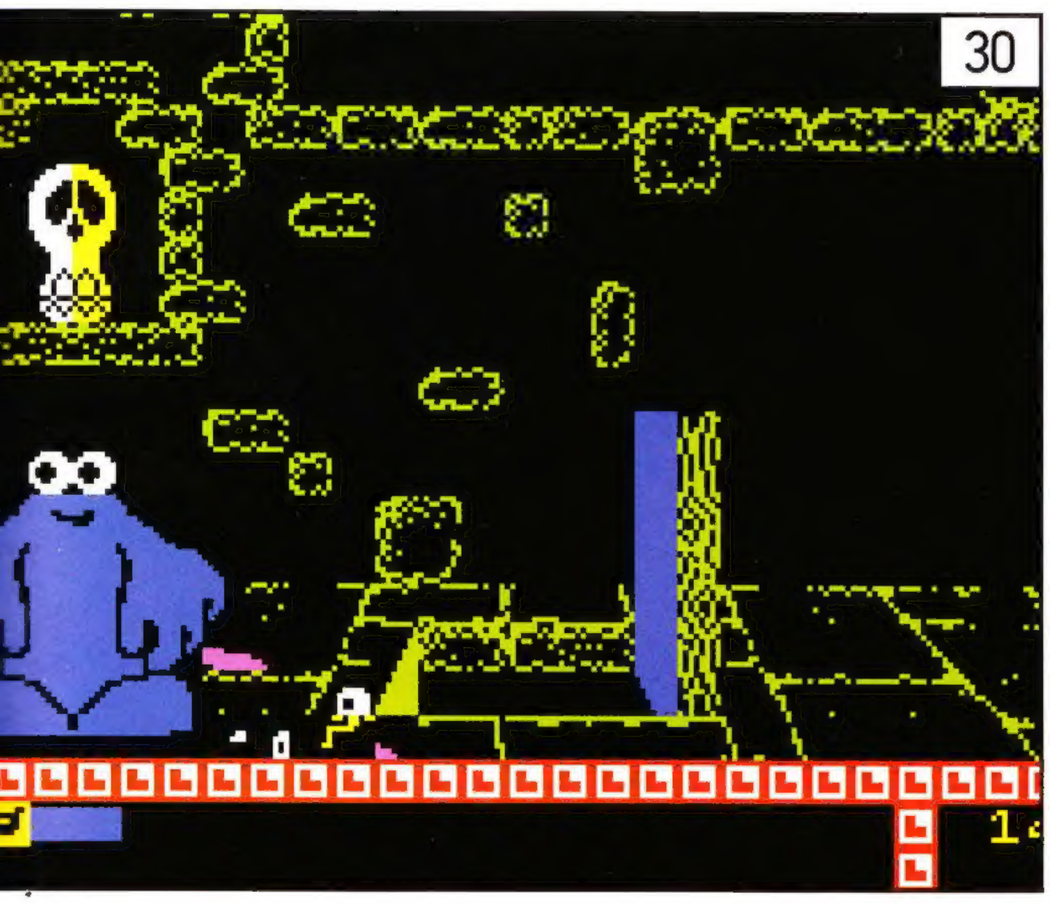

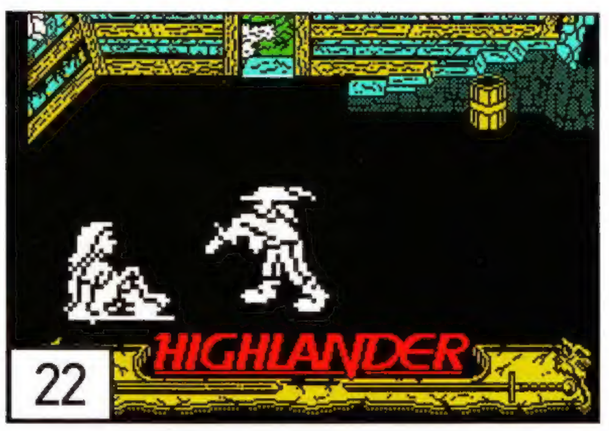

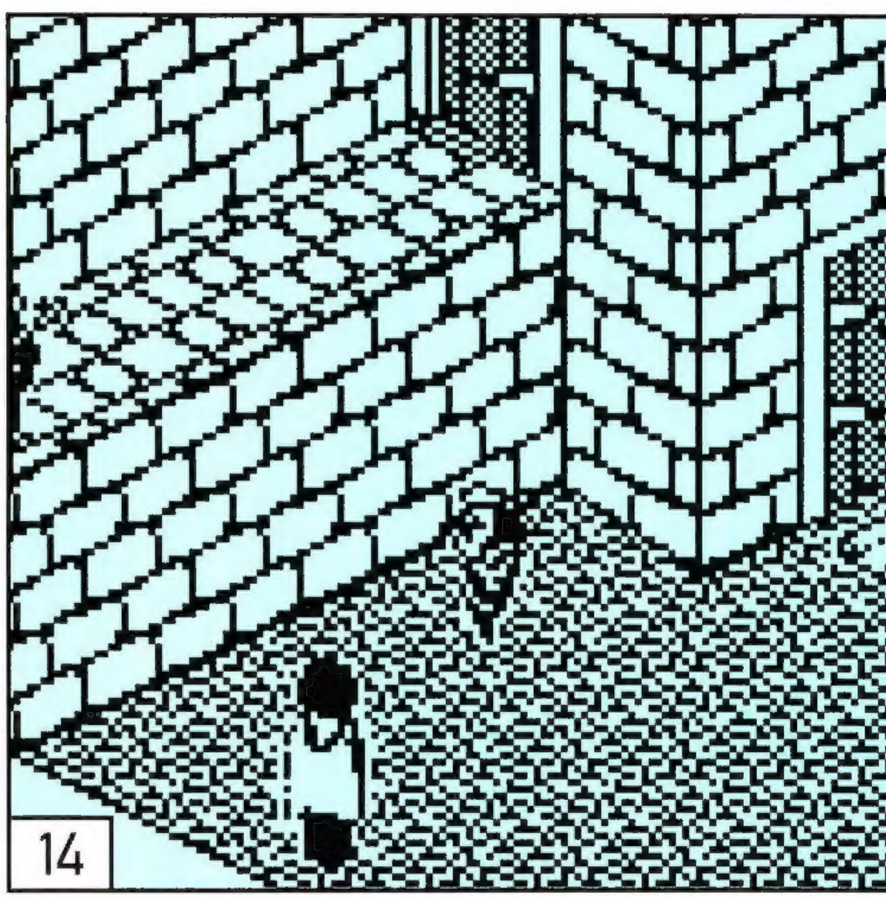

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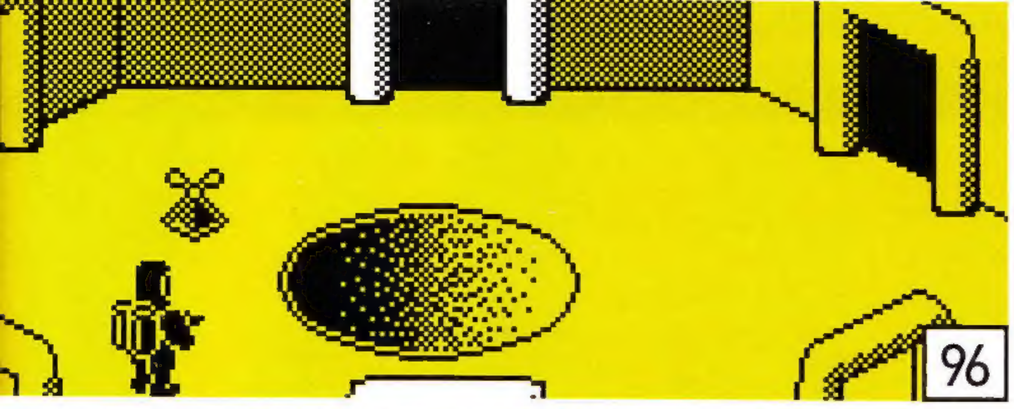

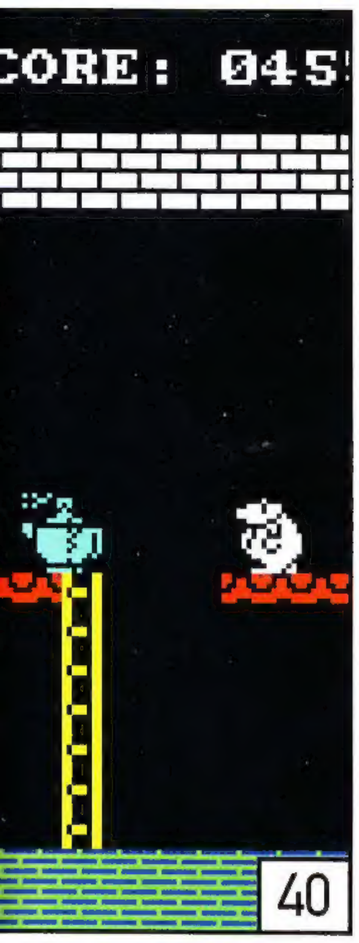

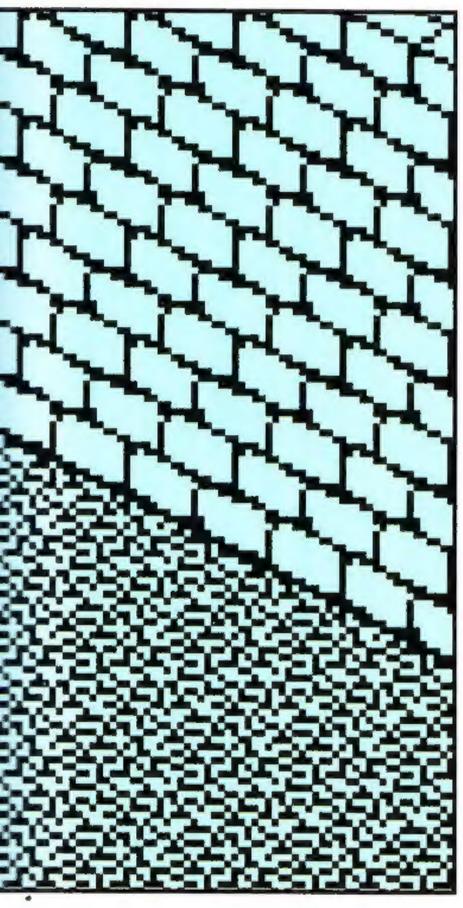

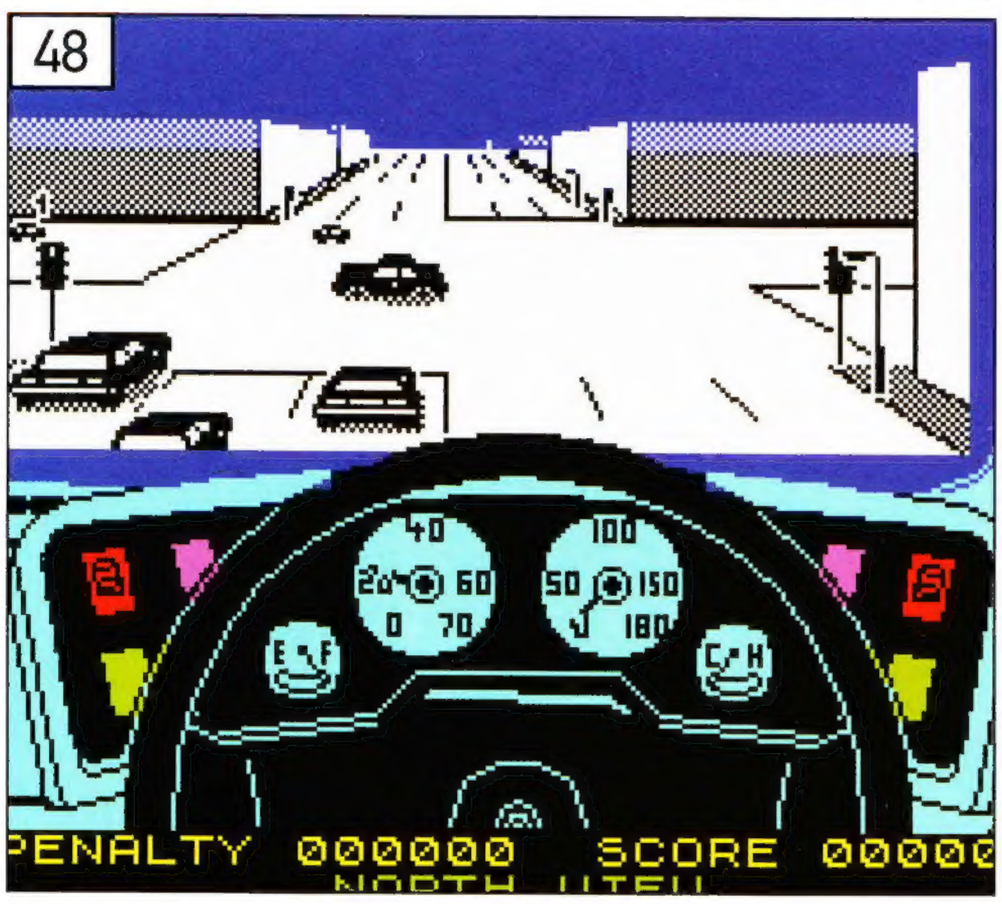

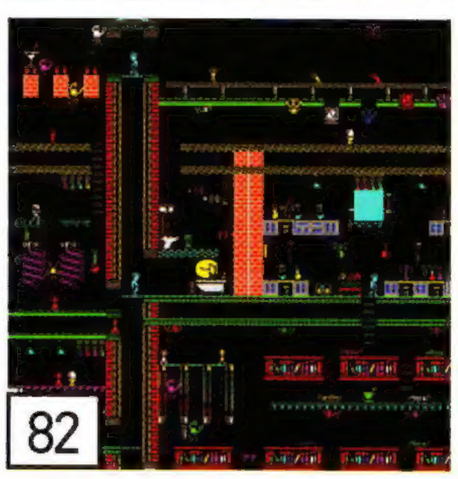

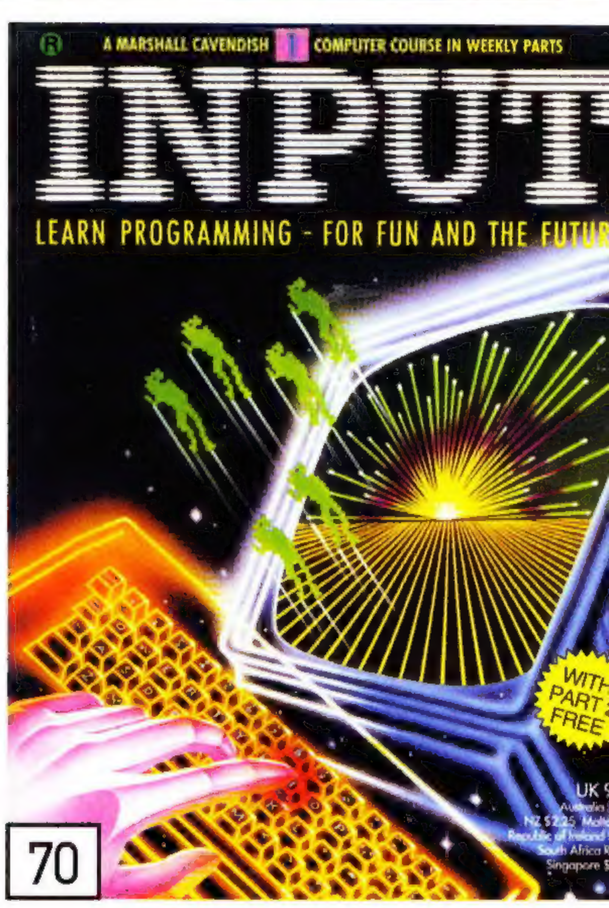

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Year Released: 1982

Original Price: £125 (£175 48k)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated Magazines: Crash, Your Sinclair, Sinclair User, Sinclair Programs, Sinclair Answers, ZX Computing

Why the Spectrum was great... Owning a Spectrum was like being part of a secret club. Like-minded gamers who knew what it meant to type out hundred line pokes, wait ten minutes for *The Hobbit* to load, and had mastered the art of tape-to-tape copying.

sinclair

ZX Spectrum

THE HUMBLE SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM WAS SMALL AND UNASSUMING, YET IT MANAGED TO CONQUER THE UK COMPUTER MARKET DURING THE EIGHTIES AND WAS COMMERCIALLY VIABLE FOR OVER A DECADE. DURING THIS TIME THE MACHINE WON THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS AND A THRIVING FAN SCENE NOW EXISTS. AS IT CELEBRATES ITS 30TH BIRTHDAY, MARTYN CARROLL REVEALS HOW THE 8-BIT COMPUTER OVERCAME ALL THE ODDS

Having made a name for himself in the electronics field, releasing everything from pocket calculators to tiny televisions, Sir Clive Sinclair turned his entrepreneurial gaze toward computers, and in 1978 he launched the MK14. It was sold in kit form and proved to be little more than a programmable calculator, but sales of over 50,000 convinced Sir Clive that there was a hunger for computers aimed at hobbyists.

In early 1980 Sinclair released the ZX80, a diminutive home computer with a touch-sensitive membrane keyboard and just 1K of memory. It too was sold in kit form for £79, but crucially a pre-built version was available for £99, opening up the world of computers to more general home users who weren't prepared to whip out a soldering iron and start bolting bits together. However, it was the ZX80's successor, the enhanced and improved ZX81 that really kick-started the home computing craze in the UK. Released in March 1981 and available for either £49 (kit form) or £69 (pre-built), the ZX81 clocked up sales of more than 400,000 in a little over 12 months. Sinclair had devised the ultimate entry-level computer and the British public were buying into it.

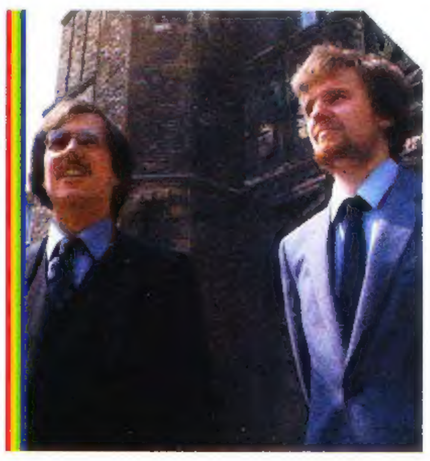
But Sir Clive wasn't about to stand idly by, counting the cheques and postal orders that were pouring into his hectic mail order department. The industry he'd had a hand in creating was moving fast, very fast, and competitors were queuing up for a piece of the pie. To compound matters, the cost of components and memory was tumbling all the time, allowing more manufacturers to tap into the low-cost computer market that belonged almost exclusively to Sinclair. Plus, there was the small matter of Acorn beating Sinclair to a lucrative BBC contract that would ultimately see Acorn computers installed in classrooms up and down the country. It was time for Sir Clive to dig in and fight his corner.

To this end, Sinclair began to mastermind the ZX82 and ZX83 models. The former would supersede the ZX81, adding sound

Tech specs

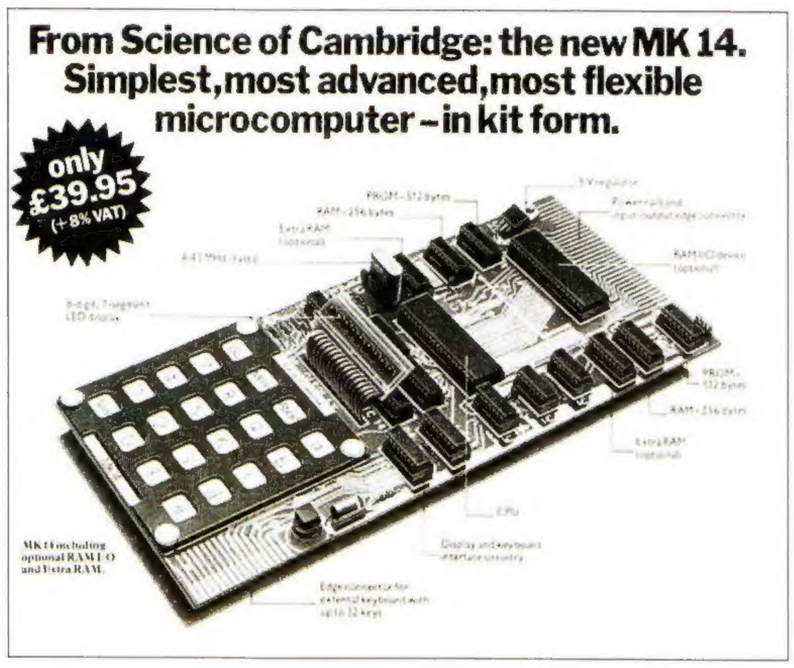
A trusty Zilog Z80A chip running at 3.54MHz powered the Spectrum. The machine was available with either 16K or 48K of RAM, and Sinclair BASIC was provided on a 16K ROM chip. The video display could output 24 lines of text with 32 character positions, and 192x256 pixels for high-resolution graphics. The Spectrum had very few external connectors. There was TV out, ear and mic ports to connect a tape recorder, and a 28-pin expansion slot for connecting a wide range of peripherals, including joystick interfaces, printers and Sinclair's own Microdrive storage system.

Sinclair's Richard Altwasser, who had previously helped develop the ZX81, designed the Spectrum's hardware. The ROM code was written almost entirely by Steve Vickers of Nine Tiles Information Handling Ltd (a small portion was adapted from the original ZX80 ROM code written by John Grant), while Sinclair designer Rick Dickinson created the casing and infamous 'dead flesh' keyboard.



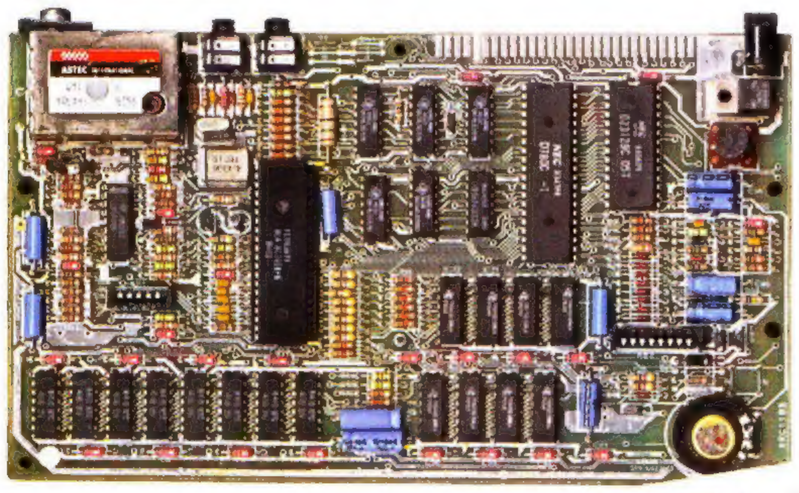
The men behind the Spectrum, Steve Vickers (left) of Nine Tiles and Richard Altwasser of Sinclair Research.

sinclair ZX Spectrum



The MK14 was Sir Clive's first home computer and today is now highly sought after by Sinclair collectors.

The first Spectrum print ad sang the Spectrum's praises, so far as to even include a glowing quote from Sir Clive himself.



The Spectrum was a fairly simple machine with no dedicated graphics hardware and limited expansion options (photo: Bill Bertram).

Released in April 1982, the Spectrum went on to become the UK's best selling home computer.

capabilities, colour graphics and a moving keyboard to the mix, while the latter was hoped to seize control of the small business market.

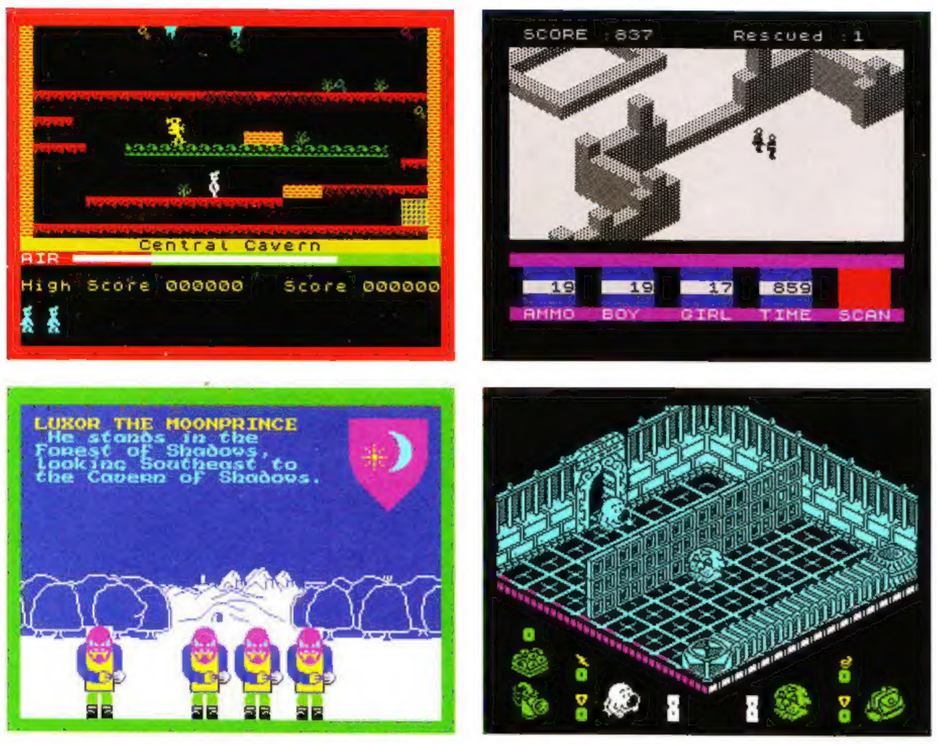
The eventual fortunes of the two machines couldn't be more different. The ZX82 was renamed the ZX Spectrum and went on to become Britain's best selling home computer. The ZX83, meanwhile, was launched as the Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap) in 1984 and failed to make an impression as a business machine. The QL is now regarded as an embarrassing footnote in the Sinclair story, second only to the disastrous C5 motorised tricycle (although to be honest, the C5 is probably more of an epitaph than a footnote).

RAINBOW BRIGHT

In April 1982, long before the QL and C5 tarnished Sir Clive's name, the Spectrum was launched in a blaze of publicity at the Earls Court Computer Show. Shortly after its unveiling, an advert for the new computer began to appear in specialist computer magazines. It was typically text-heavy and very Sinclair, hammering home each of the machine's 'astonishing' new features. Topping the list of key features was the Spectrum's high-resolution colour graphic capabilities. Whereas the ZX80/81 were monochrome machines, the Spectrum lived up to its name by outputting seven colours plus black. Sound support was also included, with the new BEEP command allowing you to control pitch and duration. The advert went on to reveal details of a full-size moving keyboard that would replace the plastic membrane used on the ZX80/81. To seal the deal, the Spectrum came with a very generous amount of RAM – 16K as standard, with an expanded 48K version also available.

But what about the price? Would Sir Clive be able to continue his noble aim of delivering affordable computers to the masses? The answer was a resounding yes. The 16K model was available for just £125, and for £50 more you could take home the 48K version. Compare that to the Commodore 64, which launched in the UK at £299. Or even better, the BBC Model B, which would lighten your pockets to the tune of £399. Sinclair had soundly undercut the competition and looked to have sewn up the market once again.

The advert posed a problem however. The Spectrum simply sounded too good to be true. All those features for such a competitive price. There had to be a catch. But before anyone could see the machine and make up their own minds, they had to suffer Sinclair's famously unreliable mail order department. Customers were advised to allow up to 28 days for delivery, and yet those who'd placed their orders early typically had to wait between 12 and 16 weeks for their shiny new machines to arrive. During the latter half of 1982 Sinclair was reportedly manufacturing 20,000 Spectrums a month and yet was still unable to meet the huge demand. It didn't help that a quantity of machines were earmarked for overseas markets following a steady European roll out. Things did ease somewhat by early 1983, mainly because the Spectrum was made available though WHSmiths and other high street chains.



Great games that made a splash on the Speccy. From left to right: *Manic Miner, Ant Attack, Lords of Midnight* and *Head over Heels.*

RUBBER SOUL

The advert flagged the Spectrum as a "powerful professional's computer", but in several respects the new computer was very similar to its more primitive forebears. It's believed that this was intentional on Sir Clive's part as a means of speeding up production and keeping costs down.

At first glance it was obvious that Sinclair had performed another miracle of miniaturisation. The Spectrum was just 23cm wide, 14cm long and 3cm deep. The most noticeable new addition were the small rubber keys that poked through the sleek black casing. A single sheet of spongy rubber was used and by pressing down on a key, the contact underneath was closed and then the key sprung back to its original position. It was preferable to the ZX81's touch-sensitive keyboard, and probably just as cost effective, but to call it a 'full-size, moving-key keyboard' was a little optimistic.

The actual keyboard layout was almost identical to the one that debuted on the ZX80. There were 40 keys in total, compared to an average of 60-70 keys found on computers with proper typewriter-style keyboards. The updated Sinclair BASIC retained its one-touch keyword entry system, where a typical key could be used to enter five different commands depending on which shift keys it was pressed in conjunction with. This input method baffled beginners and proved far too restrictive for more seasoned users. To complicate matters, a number of new BASIC commands were introduced, taking the total number of keyboard functions to a finger-bending 193. In some cases it would be quicker to manually type the command than press the required series of keys. Again, the advert was slightly wide of the mark with its "one-touch" keyword entry claims.

What about the new colour capabilities? Well, Sinclair actually undersold the Spectrum in this respect. There were eight basic colours, yet the BRIGHT command could be applied to every colour except black, making 15 in total. Coupled with the surprisingly high screen resolution (256 x 192 pixels), the Spectrum's display capabilities could rival machines retailing at twice the price. There was a drawback however. To save memory, each 8 x 8 pixel square could only display a foreground and background colour. As a result, in games where a character sprite of one colour passed over a background of a different colour, the colour of the sprite would bleed into the background. This so-called colour clash effect was unique to the Spectrum, much to the amusement of Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC owners. We can now look back and say that colour clash gave Speccy games a certain charm, but back in the day such wistful reasoning would never have settled those playground spats.

Rather than blast sound through your TV set, the Spectrum featured a small internal speaker. It was affectionately known as the 'beeper', because it, well, beeped, and that was about it. You could control the length and tone of the beep but not the volume, which was a shame because the speaker was barely audible in the first batch of models off the production line (later versions corrected this problem to some extent). Worse still, the speaker would temporarily freeze the processor while it played a sound. Considering what they had to work with, it's amazing that programmers managed to add sound effects and music to games at all. Even more remarkable is that musicians like Martin Galway and Tim Follin developed routines that simulated multiple sound channels. It was also possible to play sampled speech through the speaker, albeit in very crude fashion.

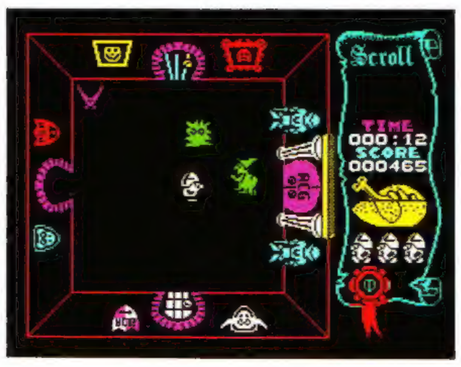
PLAY THE GAME

Despite these technical shortcomings, the Spectrum quickly generated a huge range of independent software. Games were incredibly popular and unofficial versions of arcade classics such as *Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Breakout* quickly flooded the market. Software houses that had sprung up to support the ZX81 were drawn to the new machine, attracted by its colour graphics, relatively huge memory (the 48K version at least), and rapidly growing user base.

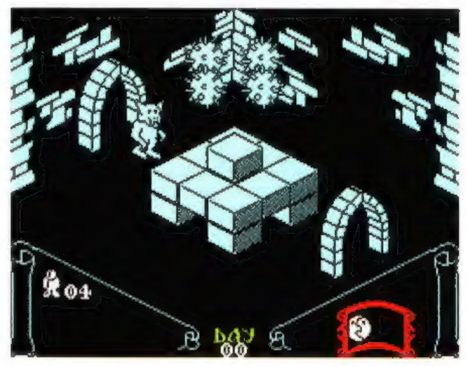
Bug-Byte, Mikro-Gen, Quicksilva, Imagine, Ocean and dozens of other developers made a name (and a small fortune) for themselves during these early years, but one company in particular stood out from the crowd. Ashby Computer and Graphics Ltd, then operating under the trade name Ultimate Play the Game, now known as Rare, set the whole scene alight with a series of stunning Spectrum games. Its first four releases (*Jetpac, Pssst, Cookie* and *Tranz Am*) became best selling classics that other developers could only dream of, and yet they all ran on a standard 16K Spectrum. Ultimate's 48K games were bigger and better, with titles like *Atic Atac, Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* whipping the computer press into a dribbling frenzy. Other ground-breaking games that debuted on the Spectrum before being ported to different machines included Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner*, Sandy White's *Ant Attack*, Mike Singleton's *Lords of Midnight* and Jon Ritman's *Head over Heels*, amongst many others. The Spectrum really was home to an embarrassing number of great games.

It was this catalogue of games, as wide as it was deep, that pushed sales of the Spectrum through the roof. In the run up to Christmas 1983, over 50,000 machines were sold every month in the UK. As the cost of components fell, Sinclair fuelled demand further by slashing the price of the Spectrum. The 16K model was reduced to just £99, nestling just under the psychological price barrier of £100, and the 48K version retailed at a very attractive £129.

This was the Spectrum's golden period, but sadly it didn't last much beyond 1984. In October of that year Sinclair released the Spectrum+, which rather than a souped-up Speccy that buyers and retailers hoped for, merely added a moving QL-style keyboard. Similarly, the long-awaited Spectrum 128, which received a low-key UK launch in February 1986, was essentially a Spectrum+ with 128K memory, a new three channel sound chip and an updated version of Sinclair BASIC. These updates were cautious, lazy even, perhaps because by this time Sinclair's focus (and finances) had shifted almost exclusively to the doomed C5 project. In summer 1986 Amstrad acquired Sinclair's computing arm and went on to create Spectrum-based clones of its popular CPC range. Amstrad's +2 and +3 models were marketed as games machines and certainly attracted new buyers, but those who'd fallen in love with the ZX line would sadly never see a true successor to the Spectrum. Perhaps if Sinclair had continued to attack the competition as aggressively as it had done during the early Eighties then a 16-bit computer capable of undercutting the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST might have been a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, a place in computing history is unreservedly set-aside for the not-so-humble Sinclair Spectrum.



Sinclair Research boss Sir Clive Sinclair, pictured here at the QL launch in January 1984.



The wonderful World of Spectrum

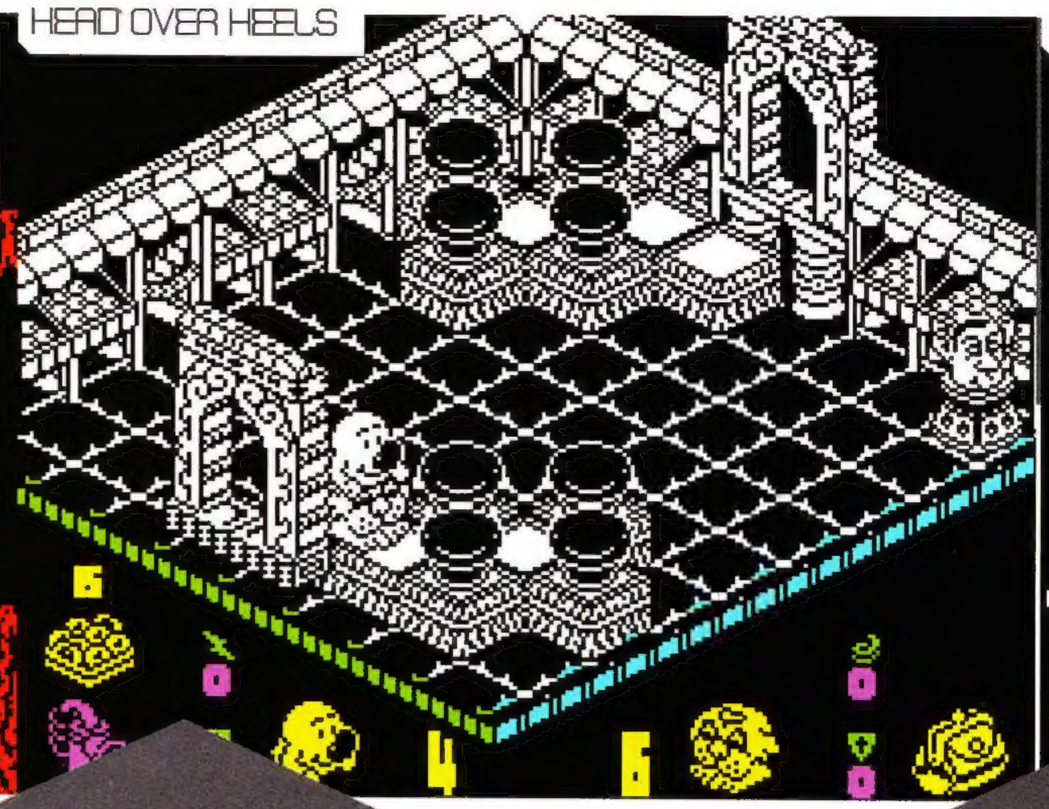
Speccy fans are fortunate in that one of the Web's best retro sites is dedicated to the machine. World of Spectrum (www.worldofspectrum.org) contains information on more than 12,500 games, with screenshots, links to reviews, and in the vast majority of cases, downloadable ROMs that can be played on modern platforms via emulation. Don't let the presence of ROMs deter you though – webmaster Martijn van der Heide actively seeks permission from publishers to offer the games freely on the site, and will remove games if requested by an IP owner.

World of Spectrum celebrated its 10th birthday at the end of the November, and we asked Martijn if he was planning to celebrate the anniversary. "Well I've added a smallish new section to the site, covering the Timex versions of the Spectrum," he replied in typically modest fashion. But what about the long-term future of WoS? "It will take several more years to update the databases so I hope to provide a more complete history over time. Other than that we are aiming to provide many more screenshots. And when more people have broadband Internet we'll shift to a more glossy, interactive environment." Sounds good, Martijn. Here's to the next 10 years...

World of Spectrum is not just the best Speccy site on the Web, but arguably the best retro resource full stop.

PERFECT TEN GAMES

STARQUAKE



HEAD OVER HEELS

ATIC ATAC

STARQUAKE

- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHED BY:** BUBBLEBUS SOFTWARE
- **CREATED BY:** STEVE CROW
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** FIRELORD, WIZARD'S LAIR

Steve's Crow unbelievably addictive flick-screen platformer mixes pure playability with crisp sci-fi graphics and frantic puzzle solving. It's one of those games where every aspect has been polished to gleaming perfection; whether it's the mini-Mastercards that open any doors (geddit), the ability to summon temporary platforms beneath you at will, or the handy passworded teleporters that make light work of navigating the immense caverns. But it's the sheer speed of the thing that makes *Starquake* such an exhilarating experience on the Spectrum. Crow's devious mazes require serious cunning to traverse, and it's all kept at a feverish pace thanks to a constant supply of energy-sapping enemies. A must for every Spectrum aficionado, *Starquake* is pure 48k bliss.

ANT ATTACK

- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **PUBLISHED BY:** QUICKSILVA
- **CREATED BY:** SANDY WHITE
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** I OF THE MASK, ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

Few games in the early Eighties were as atmospheric and downright terrifying as *Ant Attack*, the first real home video game to be viewed from an isometric perspective. The ghostly monotone graphics only served to intensify the desolation of the abandoned walled city of Antescher, and made the sudden appearance of the titular arthropods even more shocking. Typical games are spent tear-arsing around the tomb-like structures desperately following the green or red signals from your scanner to locate each lost soul. Sudden ant attacks are agile and persistent and require a dash to high ground or a well-aimed grenade to avoid. One of the few games to actually allow you to choose your sex, *Ant Attack* is still a prime example of a simple concept well implemented and burnt into the minds of a generation of gamers.

HEAD OVER HEELS

- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** NAMTIR RAIDERS, BATMAN, MATCHDAY I & II, MONSTER MAX

Pre 1987 Ritman and Drummond had toyed with the likes of the similarly isometric *Batman*. But it was with *Head Over Heels* that the duo truly achieved greatness. It's difficult to describe now the impact this game had when it was released; surpassing every other 3-D platformer in an instant with its relentless assault of clever ideas, kitsch graphics and surefooted game design. Ritman is a master of Rubik's Cube-style puzzles and nearly every room requires lateral thinking and more than a dash of fingertip dexterity. Dividing the *Head and Heels* character's abilities, so that they can only progress so far as separate entities and must literally join forces to complete the game, is a masterstroke, and typical of the ingenuity that seeps from the game's every pore.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- **CREATED BY:** DENTON DESIGNS
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** ENIGMA FORCE, SHADOWFIRE, WHERE TIME STOOD STILL, COSMIC WARTOAD

In the year of the space shuttle Challenger disaster, Spectrum owners were treated to one of the finest isometric adventures ever to appear on Sir Clive's rubber marvel. *The Great Escape* is set in a Colditz-style POW camp during WWII, and the objective is to escape before your morale is crushed, and without alerting the guards and getting thrown into the cooler. What makes the game so compelling is the attention to detail and a real sense of confinement. The graphics are finely crafted, and clever little touches like the morale flag, the searchlights at night, the hidden tunnels, and the way you default to the camp routine if you stop playing, make the game a true classic. Just look at it.

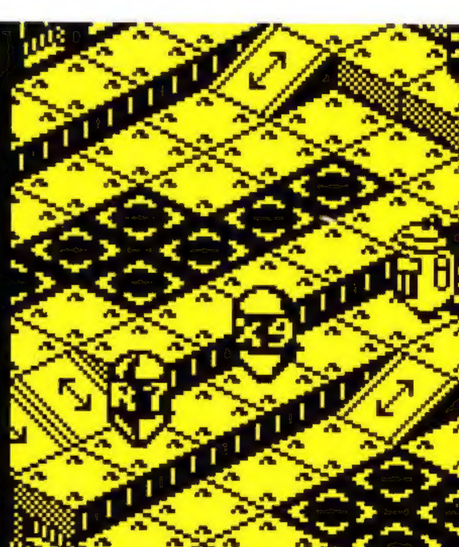
ATIC ATAC

- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **PUBLISHED BY:** ULTIMATE
- **CREATED BY:** TIM STAMPER, CHRIS STAMPER
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** LUNAR JETMAN, SABRE WULF, ALIEN 8, GUNFRIGHT, KNIGHTLORE

No 'perfect ten' list for the Spectrum would be complete without a solid showing from the Stamper brothers and their superb Ultimate label. *Atic Atac* makes it into the list by a narrow margin (so many Ultimate games are outright classics) because it set the scene for Ultimate to dominate the Spectrum. Playing as Knight, Wizard or Serf, *Atic Atac* is an overhead perspective arcade adventure set over 200+ rooms in a gothic castle populated by endless minions, as well as Frankenstein, Quasimodo, the Mummy and of course Dracula. It's fast, it's challenging, and even today it provides hours of entertainment.

ANT ATTACK

THE GREAT ESCAPE



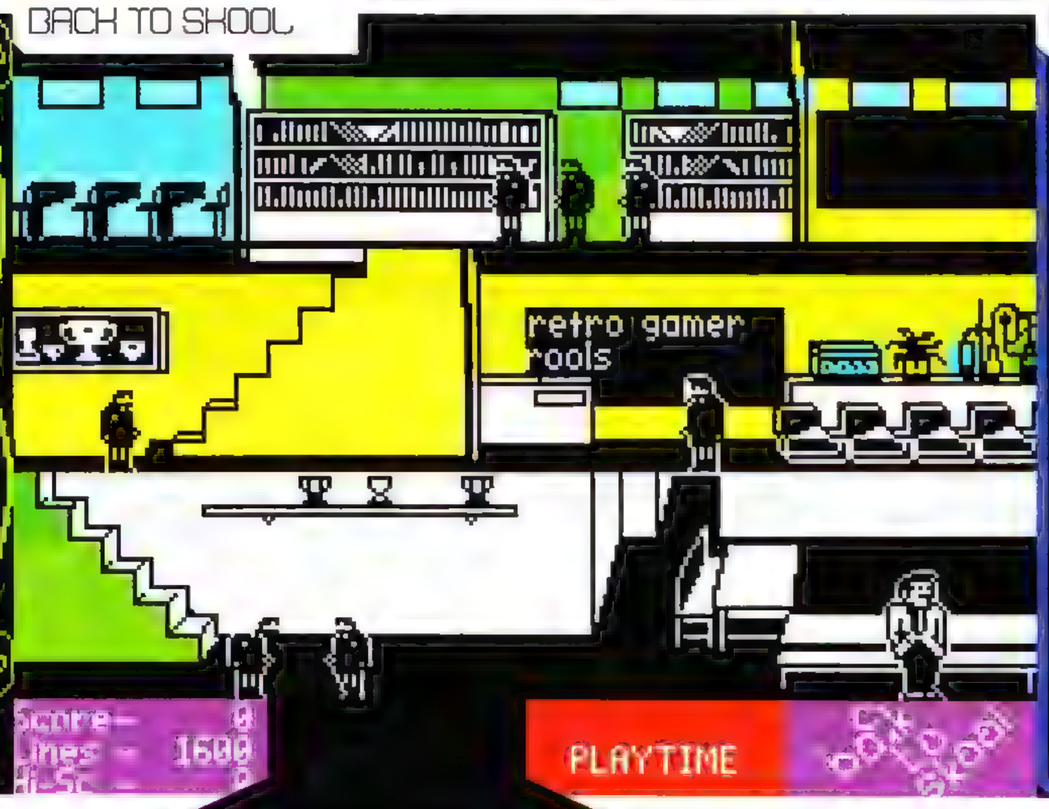
QUAZATRON

sinclair

ZX Spectrum

A magnificent machine like the Speccy deserves a well thought-out and balanced appreciation of the ten best games, especially when there are so many genuinely superb titles that could be covered. The following list wasn't easy to put together, but we guarantee that it includes some of the best games to be found on the system.

BACK TO SKOOL



REBEL STAR

QUAZATRON

- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHED BY:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
- **CREATED BY:** STEVE TURNER
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SPACE WARS 3D, AVALON, DRAGONTORC, RANA RAMA, ZYNAPS

We're going out on a bit of a limb here, because Steve Turner's *Quazatron* is not generally considered one of the top ten Spectrum games, but hey, it's our list, right? So what if it stole C64 *Paradroid's* innovative 'grappling' system, and the lifts to other levels are kinda similar, *Quazatron* carves a niche for itself, and you can't deny the clever use of colour, the detail on the droids, and the *Marble Madness*-inspired gameplay. Where *Quazatron* scores highly is the player's desire to battle and strip the best parts from your fellow robots, boost their own abilities, and then wipe each level clean before descending to the next. A simply magnificent game.

BACK TO SKOOL

- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHED BY:** MICROSPHERE
- **CREATED BY:** DAVID REEDY
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SKOOL DAZE, WHEELIE, CONTACT SAM CRUISE

Together with the original *Skool Daze*, *Back to Skool* represents bedroom programming at its best – quintessentially British, packed with detail, and eminently playable, how could this game fail to appeal to its audience of rowdy teenagers? Allowing the player to individually name the cast of characters was Reedy's masterstroke because it meant your could personalise and relate to them instantly. What makes *Back to Skool* such a great Spectrum game though is the way it plays and the St Trinians-esque details, like riding the bike through the school, shooting water pistols, releasing the mouse to make the girls jump, and of course avoiding the cane of the sinister Mr Whacker. Fond, fond memories...

JET SET WILLY

- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SOFTWARE PROJECTS
- **CREATED BY:** MATTHEW SMITH
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** MANIC MINER

The follow-up to *Manic Miner* is set in a sprawling mansion (bought with the profits from mining no doubt) and is both exciting and infuriating in equal measures. Gaming legend Matthew Smith showers you with extra lives to help you collect the 83 flashing objects – and you need them, as the difficulty level in rooms like the Banyan Tree, Out on a Limb, and the Forgotten Abbey is utterly insane! Smith's Python-inspired characters and unforgiving gameplay has sealed *JSW's* place in Spectrum history and spawned a hundreds clones, the best of which is probably Elite's *Rollercoaster*.

REBEL STAR

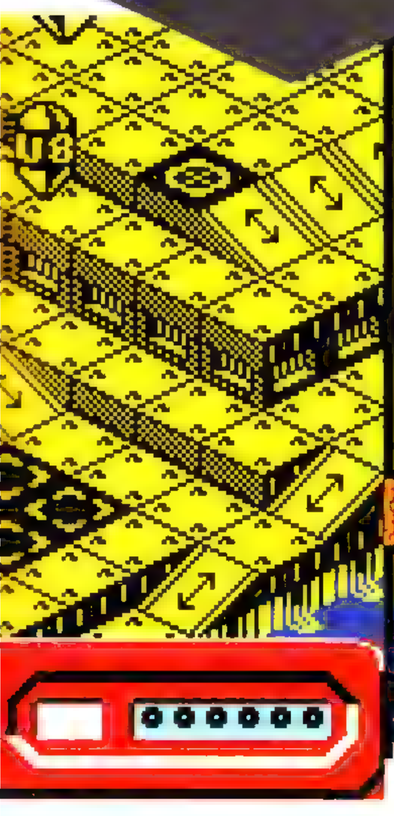
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
- **CREATED BY:** JULIAN GOLLOP
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** CHAOS, LASER SQUAD, REBEL STAR 2, REBEL STAR RAIDERS

Just pipping Gollop's earlier masterpiece, *Chaos*, into our top ten, *Rebel Star* is a turn-based sci-fi strategy game in which you control either of two opposing forces in a moonbase battle (there was also a two player game on the flip-side of the tape and all for £1.99!). What seals *Rebel Star's* greatness is the pure strategy and cunning that must be employed to succeed; making the best of your forces' abilities and different armaments. Julian Gollop, where are you now?

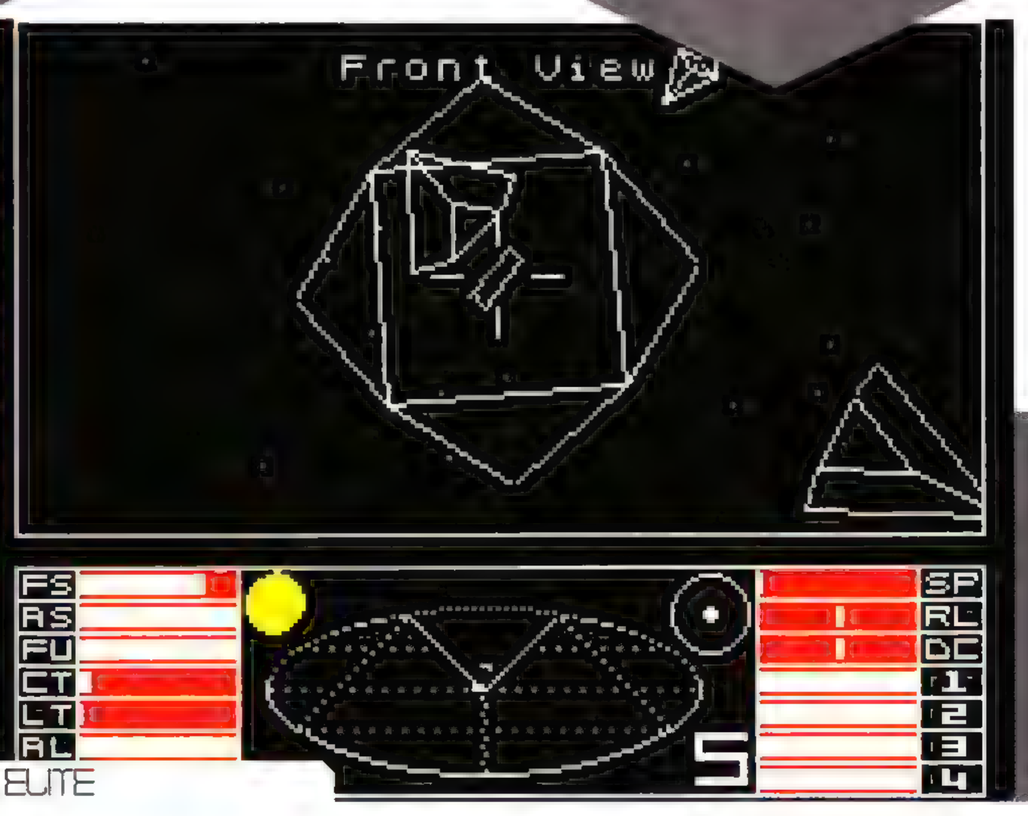
ELITE

- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
- **CREATED BY:** TORUS
- **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** GYRON

No top ten could be complete without the obligatory conversion of the ultimate space trading game, and this Torus version remains faithful to Bell and Braben's original vision whilst at the same time adding some enhancements. That's if you could actually play the damn thing however, because *Elite* was the first ever game to utilise the Lenslock anti-piracy thingy, which managed to frustrate legitimate customers and pirates in almost equal measures. Fortunately *Elite* was worth it, with ultra-smooth and flicker-free frame rate, impressive magenta explosions, and for the 128k at least, three special missions.



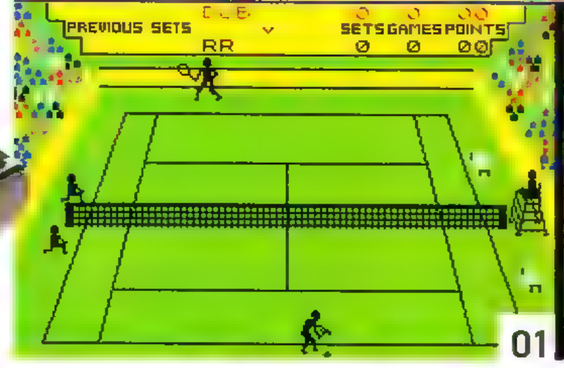
JET SET WILLY



ELITE

sinclair ZX Spectrum

With over twelve thousand Spectrum games in existence, its importance as the genesis of modern videogaming cannot be overstated, and many of today's most successful developers cut their teeth on Sir Clive's finest.



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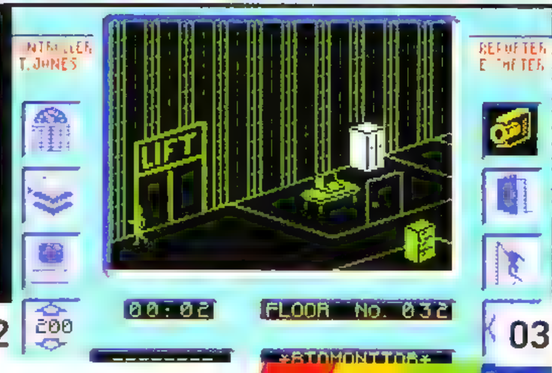

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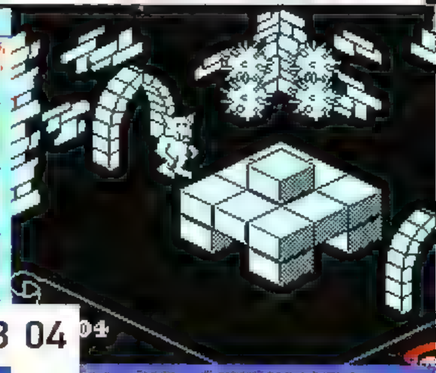

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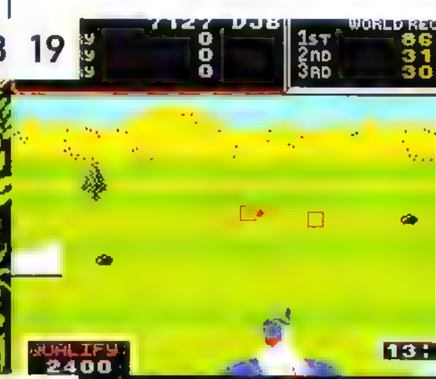

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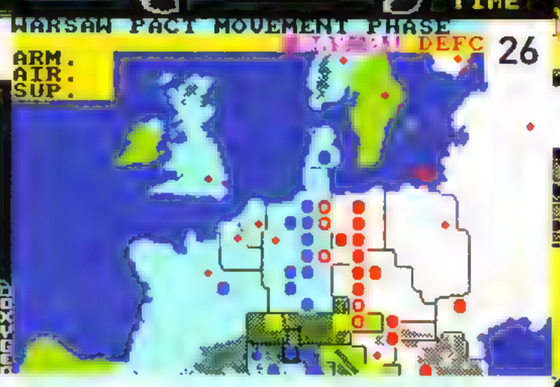

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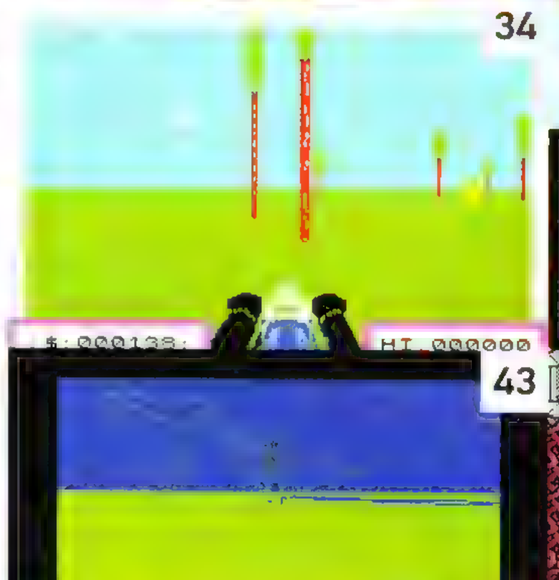

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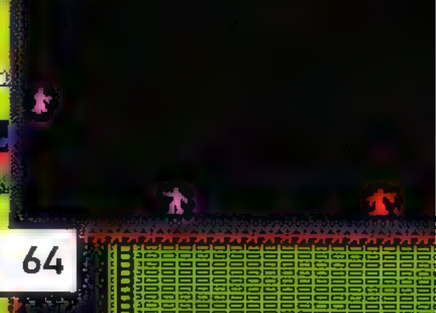

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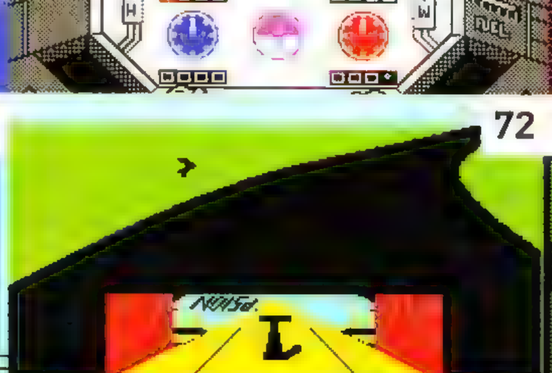

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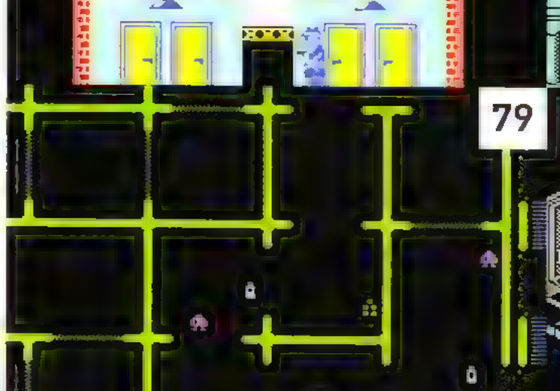

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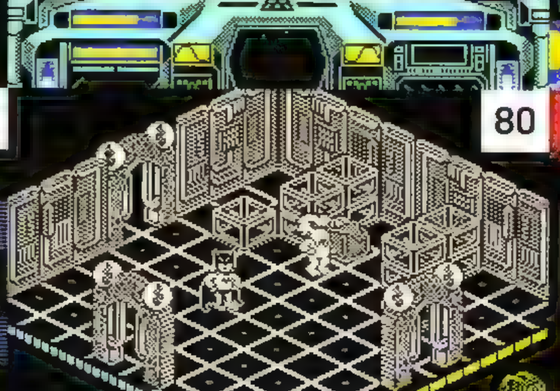

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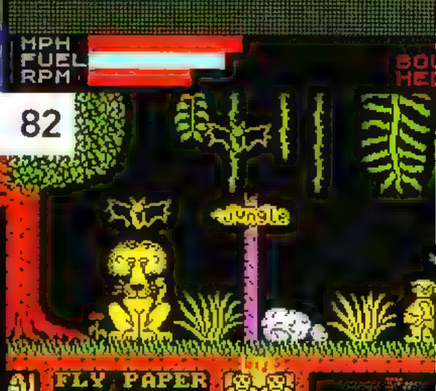

01 MATCHPOINT
02 GREEN BERET
03 MAX HEADROOM
04 KNIGHT LORE
05 STOP THE EXPRESS
06 HIGHLANDER
07 STAR WARS
08 BARRY MCGUIGAN WORLD BOXING
09 DUNGEON ADVENTURE
10 LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
11 SKOOL DAZE
12 DUN DARACH
13 TAPPER
14 ROBIN O' THE WOOD
15 THE HOBBIT
16 CHUCKIE EGG
17 KNIGHT RIDER
18 SABRE WULF
19 HYPERSPORTS
20 TURBO ESPRIT
21 TLL
22 CYCLONE
23 TRAPDOOR
24 YIE AR KUNG FU
25 STAR ON
26 THEATRE EUROPE
27 COMMANDO
28 SPIKEY HAROLD
29 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
30 ENDURORACER
31 PSSST
32 CODENAME MAT
33 FEUD
34 3D DEATHCHASE
35 C5 CLIVE
36 GUNFRIGHT
37 THE SENTINEL
38 HARRIER ATTACK
39 ALIEN
40 CONTACT SAM CRUISE
41 ROLLERCOASTER
42 TAU CETI
43 MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG
44 CYBERNOID
45 TECHNICIAN TED
46 DAN DARE
47 KNIGHT TYME
48 KOKOTONI WILF
49 FAIRLIGHT
50 MANIC MINER
51 LUNAR JETMAN
52 THANATOS
53 WEST BANK
54 TRASHMAN
55 CHAOS
56 UNDERWURLDE
57 MIAMI VICE
58 GLIDER RIDER
59 RAMBO
60 CAULDRON II
61 SAI COMBAT
62 WINTER GAMES
63 INFILTRATOR
64 SABOTEUR
65 WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
66 BUBBLE BOBBLE
67 RENEGADE
68 EXOLON
69 SPY HUNTER
70 ELEVATOR ACTION
71 STARGLIDER
72 CHEQUERED FLAG
73 WHEELIE
74 AMAUROTE
75 DEATHSTAR INTERCEPTOR
76 JACK THE NIPPER
77 COBRA
78 RANARAMA
79 HALLS OF THE THINGS
80 BATMAN
81 DYNAMITE DAN
82 THREE WEEKS IN PARADISE
83 DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON
84 BOBBY BEARING
85 JETPAC
86 ALIEN8
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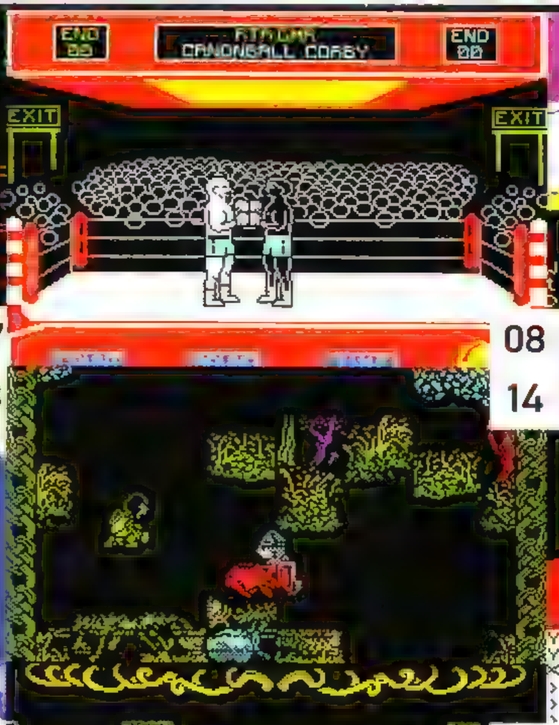

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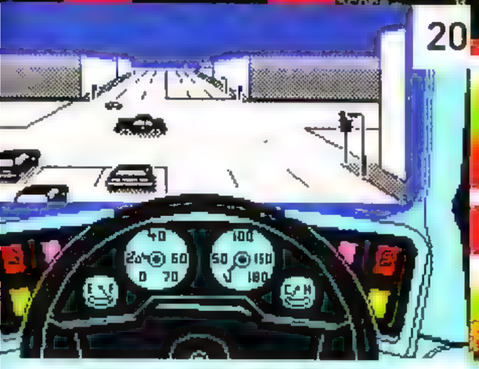

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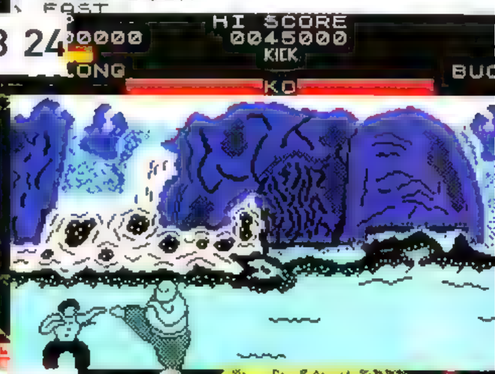

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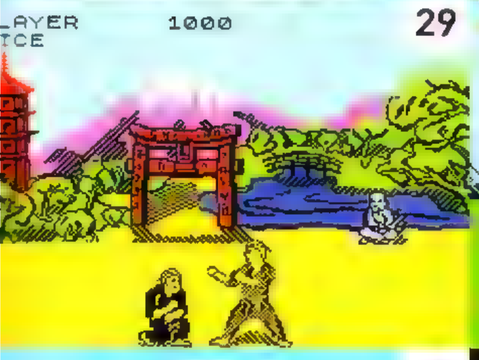

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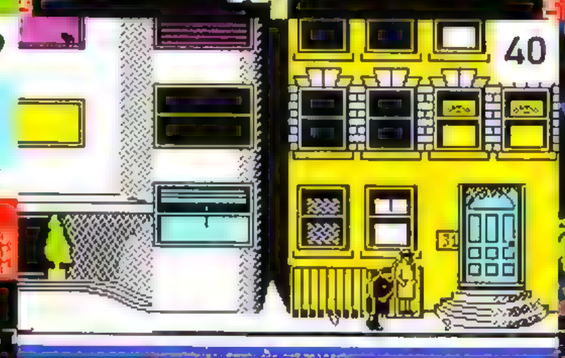

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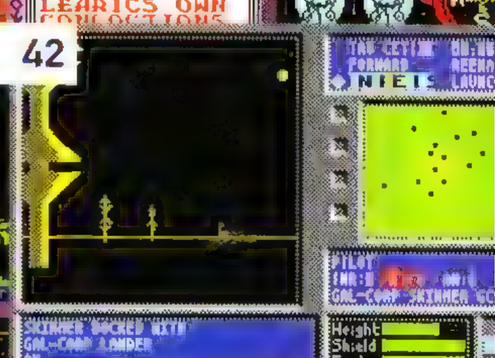

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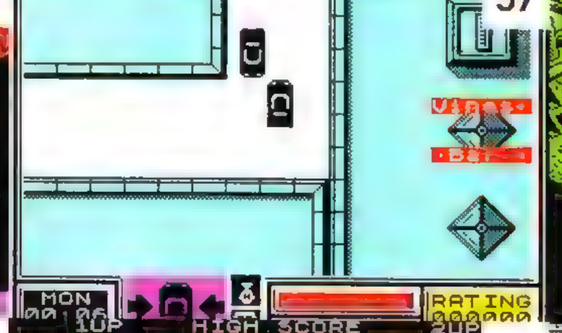

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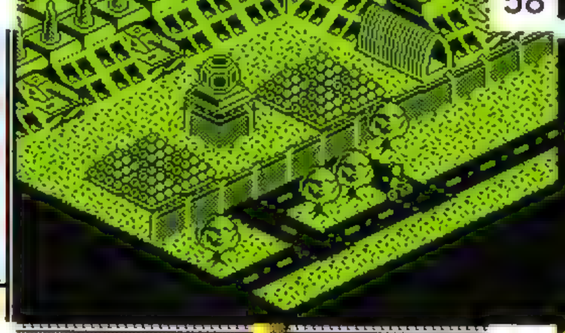

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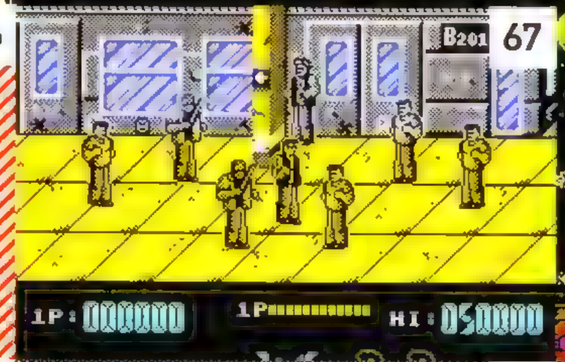

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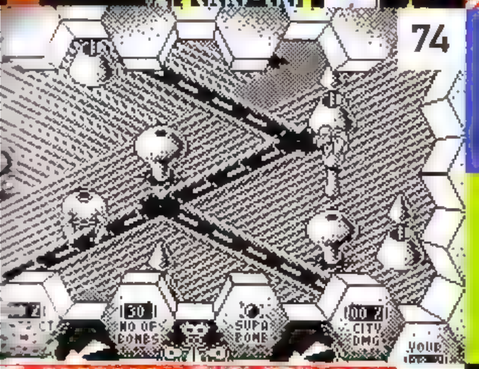

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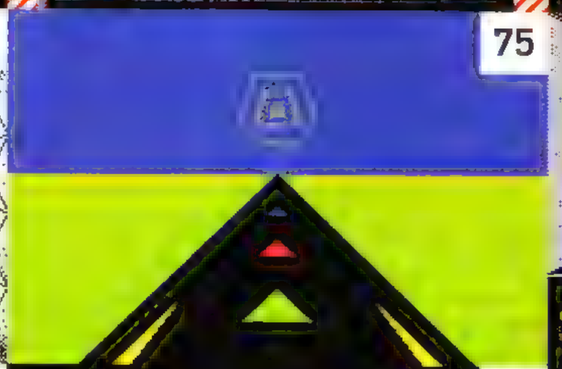

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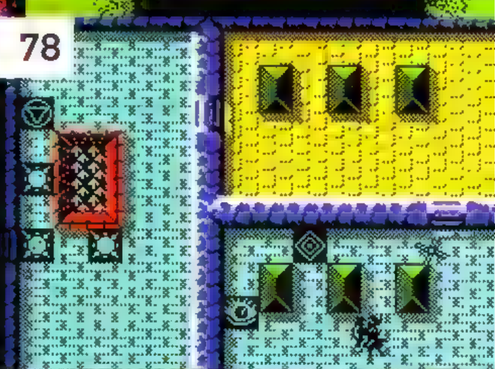

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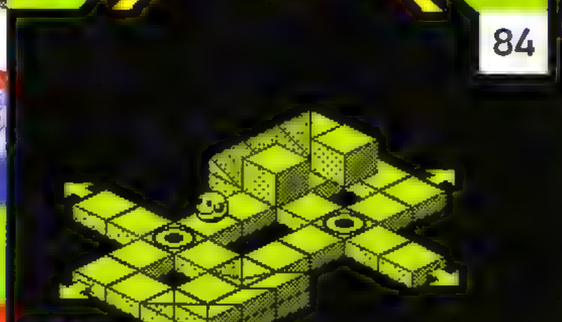

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THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

ONE RING TO RULE THEM ALL... NO, WAIT

PUBLISHER BEYOND SOFTWARE
RELEASED: 1984
GENRE: ADVENTURE
FEATURED HARDWARE: ZX SPECTRUM
EXPECT TO PAY: A FEW QUID

HISTORY

If you were a kid in the Eighties, and a videogame fanatic who also happened to be obsessed with Tolkien – with a possible hankering to 'be' Frodo – you were likely to have been disappointed with officially licensed fare. The hotly anticipated Parker Brothers Lord Of The Rings Atari 2600 game never materialised, and Melbourne House's 1985 follow-up to The Hobbit – a dull text adventure – was a turgid, dull, somewhat incoherent text adventure. These negative experiences must have so damaged videogaming's collective psyche that it was 1988 before a subsequent game set in Tolkien's universe was attempted: the slightly overambitious but nonetheless impressive and engrossing War In Middle-earth.

That the last of those games was actually pretty good might have something to do with the involvement of Mike Singleton, who'd a few years earlier created his very own 'Middle-earth' of sorts. In an unashamed 'tribute' to Tolkien, Singleton fashioned the astonishingly ahead-of-its-time strategy/adventure title The Lords Of Midnight. Despite it being released for the ZX Spectrum and converted to the equally underpowered C64 and Amstrad CPC, The Lords Of Midnight stands the test of time today, and, amazingly, still has people arguing about the best strategies to defeat Doomdark, the suitably named bad guy, who isn't at all a thinly disguised Sauron.

Ultimately, though, the names and the overly familiar fantasy territory don't really matter; they never did. To a child's eyes, The Lords Of Midnight was like being dumped at the edge of Middle-earth. With the breathtaking landscape system, you were afforded freedom within a huge map that meant the game felt far more like an epic fantasy quest than Melbourne House's limited text adventure. Today, the sense of wonder remains on reacquainting yourself with Luxor and pals, although this feeling is naturally mixed with admiration for Singleton's technical genius and a touch of sadness that the originally conceived trilogy was never completed on 8-bit hardware. Still, Lords and its magnificent sequel, Doomdark's Revenge, ensure that there's enough Midnight for any retro gamer.

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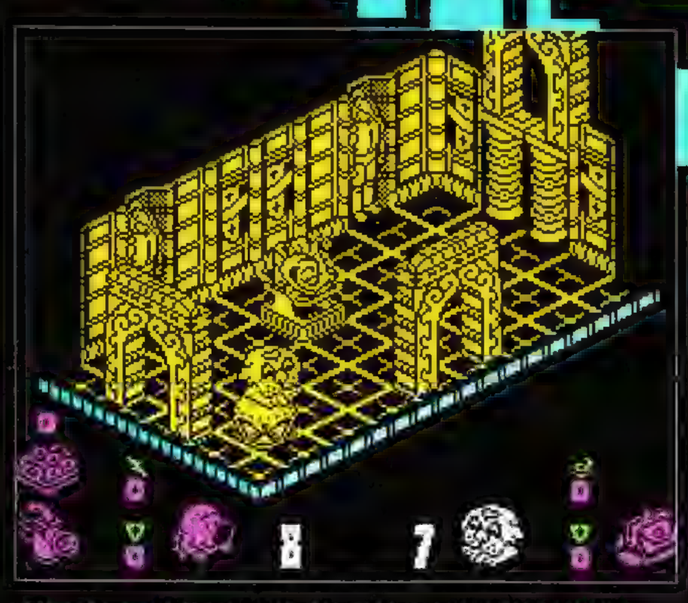
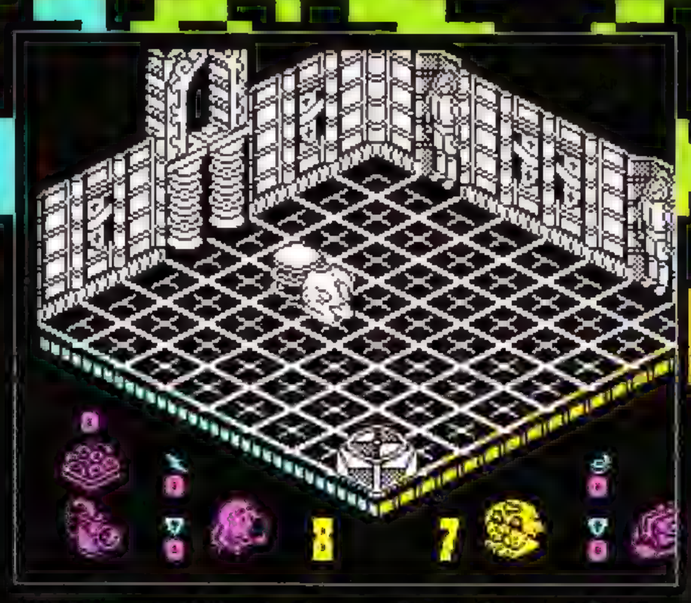
THE MAKING OF...

HEAD OVER HEELS

The Spectrum had a massive number of excellent isometric adventures in its library, but few were as inventive, imaginative, and downright crazy as Head Over Heels. Jon Ritman reveals the method behind the madness of his surreal Spectrum masterpiece



» There's something really fishy about this game! Heh heh heh! (I'm here all week...)



» Heels is pretty rubbish when it comes to jumping. Fortunately handy items like this put a spring in his step.

» "Getting that bit-part in *Doctor Who* was a mistake," mused Prince Charles, as Heels controlled him via a giant joystick.

» There were all sorts of weird and surreal objects and items in *Head Over Heels*. Want to jump over toasters, or fire a donut gun? No problem.

» Many levels in *Head Over Heels* are filled with deadly enemies, meaning you must move with caution.

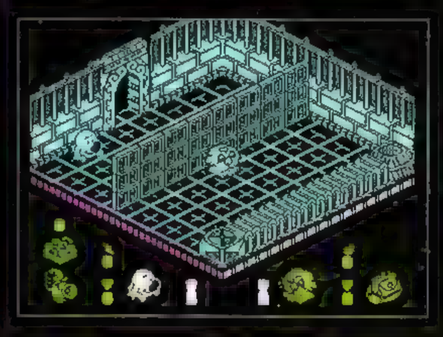
Delve into videogaming history and you'll be met with a plethora of strange-looking characters, along with a healthy population of anthropomorphic animals, out to right wrongs or to steal Sinclair C5s. The characters in Jon Ritman's timeless classic *Head Over Heels* are a rather unsettling combination of the two (Head is big-nosed noggin that has spindly arms with bat-like wings attached, and Heels resembles a dog, minus two feet, a tail and a torso), and yet their unique look fits in with their utterly surreal surroundings. And when combined with the game's then-epic scale and plentiful (and often infuriating) puzzles, *Head Over Heels* was ensured a permanent position in the top-list of any aficionado of 8-bit gaming.

For the uninitiated, *Head Over Heels* is an isometric arcade adventure, where the player guides the stars of the show – who both happen to be spies – around various locations, solving puzzles. The game's surreal plot (which can be sourced at World of Spectrum – www.worldofspectrum.org – and which Jon admits was "bullshit I wrote on the last day" to tie together the game's disparate elements and help the user make sense of the eclectic array of characters and imagery) centres on the evil Blacktooth Empire and a quartet of enslaved planets. The game begins with Head and Heels banged up in adjoining cells, with two aims in mind: 'liberating' crowns from the clutches of the evil Blacktooth Empire, and escaping to Freedom, their home planet. Luckily, Blacktooth prisons appear to be progressive, and teleporters are found near the two creatures' starting locations, so they can begin their quest.

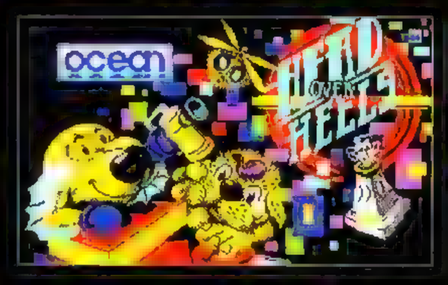
When *Head Over Heels* was released, back in 1987, almost every publication from Sinclair User to Zzap!64 was full of praise. But *Head Over Heels* always felt more at home on the Spectrum and Amstrad – the C64 was lumbered, by

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

The symbiotic partnership enjoyed by Head and Heels is central to the game, and you won't progress far without managing to get the pair together. As if the potential for a major power-up wasn't enough to enthuse players (when Head and Heels are joined, the pair enjoy both the speed of Heels and Head's jumping power), Jon added further elements to urge players onwards. If Head wanders through the door from his start point, he'll see Heels in the adjoining cell, separated from him by an impassable barrier. And shortly afterwards, the pair cross paths, Heels in a tunnel and Head on top of it. "The tunnel was inspired by a section in Ultimate's *Alien 8*, where you come out on a balcony, able to see a room that you can't get down to," explains Jon, adding that he "liked the 'tease' element to it," and therefore used the same device to torment players in his own game!



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN (WITH BERNIE DRUMMOND)

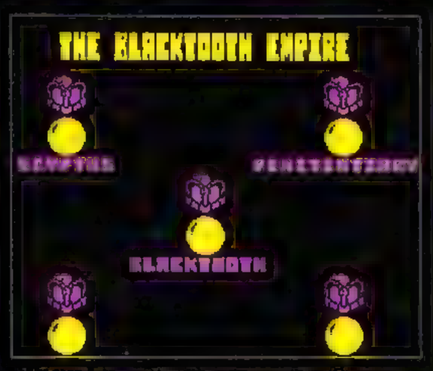
» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

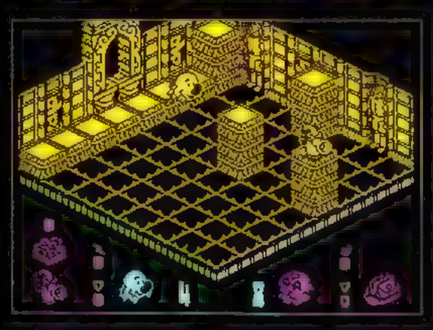
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

"BATMAN AND HEAD OVER HEELS WERE BASICALLY UNPLANNED; I MADE THEM UP AS I WENT ALONG, AND JUST KEPT ADDING STUFF UNTIL THE SPECTRUM WAS FULL" JON RITMAN

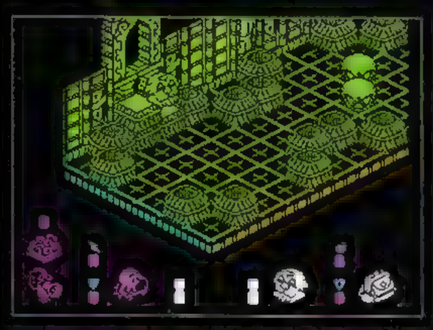
THE MAKING OF...
HEAD OVER HEELS



» If this is to scale, it's going to be a bugger to lug those crowns back to Freedom.



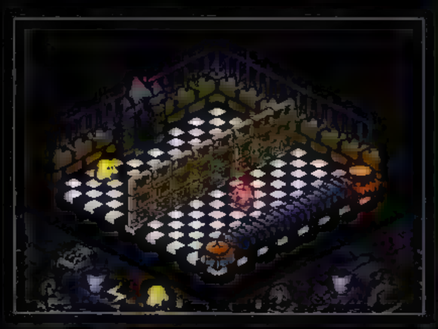
» Head will not get far without his precious doughnut gun. Be sure to pick it up before reaching the market.



» This room looks huge, but it's actually a clever illusion.

THE REMAKING OF A CLASSIC

Despite the popularity of *Head Over Heels*, few remakes of the game have surfaced, largely due to its complexity. However, a few years back, Tomaz Kac took up the challenge (apparently because of a "hastily scrawled diagram posted on the Retrospec mailing list about how you can't properly sort isometric games without complex masking," according to co-conspirator and graphic artist Graham Goring), resulting in a faithful update, but with wildly improved graphics and lighting effects that put the original 16-bit conversions to shame. "I've seen the remake, and it's pretty good," says Jon, although he grumbles that "they handled the walls and doors differently, which has damaged the gameplay". Minor problems aside, the remake is impressive, and, for once, it's not only PC users that can join the party – via the game's microsite at http://retrospec.sgn.net/games/hoh/, those who favour Mac, Linux and BeOS can download ports for their computers.



comparison, with a sluggish conversion. Unsurprisingly Jon is an unashamed fan of Sinclair machines (and, by association, Amstrad's output), and his first experience with programming was with one of Sir Clive's earliest models. "I was working as a TV engineer for Radio Rentals when they started talking about renting out computers. It occurred to me they would need engineers that knew their way around them, and so I bought myself a Sinclair ZX81." Within a day, Jon was hooked, and every evening was spent ploughing through manuals and learning Basic. A week later, Jon was immersed in machine language, writing his own hex editor, and realising that he needed to come up with a project to work on: "All I could think of was a game, and within a month I sent my first effort to publishers; a day later, I got a call from Artic Computing, who said they'd buy it".

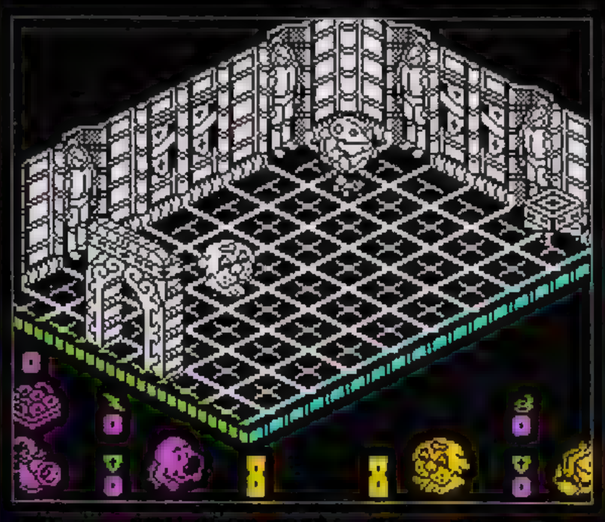
Initially, platform preference was largely irrelevant, and the ZX81 won out over Commodore's early output purely on price, but as Jon progressed to the Spectrum, he felt vindicated in his decision to buy British: "I always preferred the Spectrum to Commodore's range, because of the freedom it allowed me when being creative – Commodore's hardware pushed games designers towards sprite-based scrolling games." With 48 KB to play with, Jon crafted increasingly complex projects, including the Spectrum's answer to Commodore's *International Soccer*, the renowned *Match Day*, but it was his next game that really struck a chord, while also forming the basis for *Head Over Heels*. "When I delivered the *Match Day* master to Ocean, I was given a copy of the then-unreleased *Knight Lore*. When I saw it, my jaw dropped – it was just what I'd always wanted: a Disney film you could control," recalls Jon, who says he then set about figuring out how to achieve the masking process used for the display, and ended up bettering *Knight Lore*'s effort.

The game that used Jon's new system – *Batman* – would influence his follow-up. "For the gameplay, I decided what abilities Batman would have and then took them away," says Jon. "I created objects that would give him those abilities – jumping, carrying, gliding – with the idea that you started with nothing and would have to earn each ability. This worked well, and so when working on *Head Over Heels*, I did the same thing." Those who've played both games will notice other similarities, such as temporary extra powers and the 'resurrection' system, but *Head Over Heels* has one marked difference to Ritman's first adventure: the symbiotic relationship between its lead characters. When Head and Heels meet up, Head can plonk himself on top of Heels, and the combined freakshow creature inherits both of their capabilities. Alternatively, each character can wander off on their own, providing players with possibilities if they get stuck on one of the game's many puzzles. "I have been praised for the symbiotic relationship over the years, with many considering it genius, but at the time all I thought was that two characters, each having their own abilities, would enlarge the number of puzzles I could come up with," explains Jon.

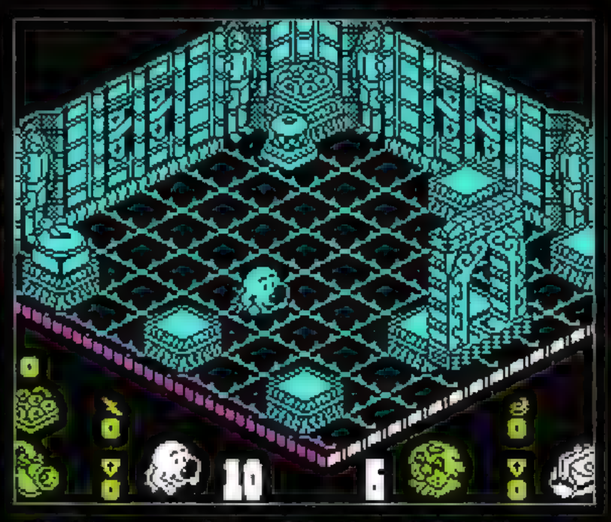
It's not that Jon's not proud of his game – far from it. It's just that he doesn't appear to want to take credit for things that 'just happened', or where a quick, simple idea worked perfectly. For fans of such a renowned retro game as *Head Over Heels*, and one that has so many disparate elements that work so well together, it's surprising to hear that there was no grand plan. "Both Batman and *Head Over Heels* were basically unplanned – I made them up as I went along, and just kept adding stuff until the Spectrum was full," explains Jon. "Once I had the basic engine, I would sit down to create some rooms, and come up with ideas." For each planet in *Head Over Heels*, maps were designed to take advantage of the two-character dynamic, with sections built where the two spies' paths would cross; further elements were then added that forced them to split and meet elsewhere. "I would then add the puzzles, making up each in turn, with no pre-planning at all," says Jon. "If I didn't have existing code to handle it, I would program it in and then ring up Bernie to ask for appropriate graphics."

Ah, yes: the graphics. Although *Batman* was a good-looking game, *Head Over Heels* betters it and then some. The graphics are quirky and eclectic, with a strong sense of individuality and character. Jon is keen to credit partner-in-crime Bernie Drummond for that aspect of the game. "Bernie has a wild imagination, and seeing as how the entire game was like a bizarre fantasy, I just gave him free rein to make things," explains Jon, when we ask how the designs for the various on-screen objects came to be. "I would just tell him the size I wanted and roughly what I was going to do with it, and he would then give me a bunch of graphics to choose from. I made a point of never worrying about differences in scale, but just chose the best looking stuff." This resulted in legions of Daleks with the heads of monkeys, elephants and even Prince Charles, vicious jet-pack-clad rat-like robots, and hostile, squat droids that look rather like bollards. As if that

"OFTEN, I WOULD HAVE A LOAD OF BERNIE'S GRAPHICS THAT WERE JUST WAITING FOR A USE, AND SO WHEN I NEEDED A 'SAVE GAME' FEATURE, I SAW THE LOVELY FISH AND MADE UP SOME BULLSHIT IN THE PLOT TO EXPLAIN IT" JON RITMAN



» This enemy is fast, but Heels is faster. Out race him, so that you can jump onto that switch in the corner.



» Head leaps towards a tray of doughnuts, claiming his rotundness is down to being 'big-boned'.

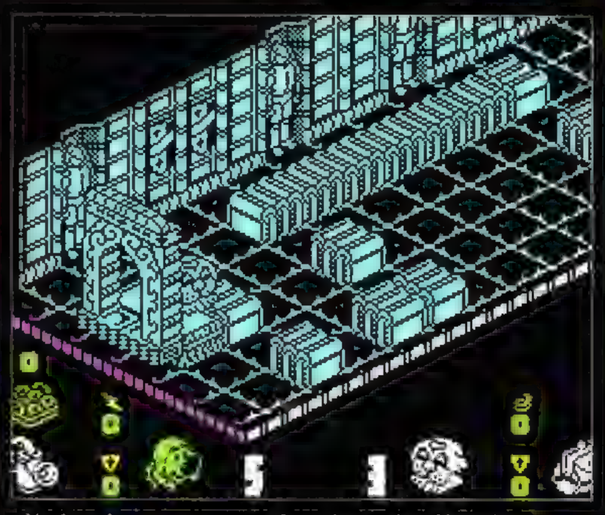
» Falling from great distances isn't a problem for Head, as he has complete control over his movement.

» This is one of the few crossover points that exist before Head and Heels eventually meet up with each other.

motley collection wasn't surreal enough, other items ended up having rather more bizarre uses, including huge sandwiches that are used as moving platforms for accessing otherwise inaccessible areas of a room, and the aforementioned giant fish, used as a resurrection device, providing players with a 'second chance' of sorts when all lives are lost. "Often, I would have a load of Bernie's graphics that were just waiting for a use, and so when I needed a 'save game' feature, I saw the lovely fish and made up some bullshit in the plot to explain it," says Jon.

In the universe of *Head Over Heels*, even the more 'normal' items can work in a way other than how you'd expect. For example, early on, Heels can grab a bag, enabling him to pick up objects. However, the bag has a hole in it, which means items are lost if Heels moves to a new room. "This was a method of keeping puzzles in a single room," explains Jon. "I decided on this tactic after playing a game where, like in *Head Over Heels*, you had a certain freedom regarding where you went. This game would have an item in one room that you needed in another, but often you might come across the item long before you saw the puzzle, having no idea what it was for. You'd leave it behind and by the time you found the puzzle, you'd forgotten the item ever existed." And so for all of the lack of planning when creating *Head Over Heels*, it's clear there was plenty of fine-tuning, in order to produce the most optimal experience. "I used to have a development kit in my living room. Needless to say, friends would come round and want a quick go on the game; I would watch carefully, and anything that proved a major problem would be noted and changed," remembers Jon. "For example, I initially put physical and mental puzzles in the same room, but by watching others play, I spotted that they'd often suss what they needed to do – the mental part – but after failing physically a couple of times, they'd assume they were wrong and would therefore try something else. I realised I needed to separate the two puzzle types."

Luckily for Jon, he was able to concentrate on these important details, because he reckons that despite all of the game's complexity, puzzles and graphics, *Head Over Heels* wasn't a technical challenge: "Once I'd sussed the method, it was pretty damn easy and conversions to other Z80 machines, such as the Amstrads, was simplicity itself". The 6502 and 68000 conversions, however,



» You're a few screens away from the market. Negotiate these conveyer belts and you're almost there.

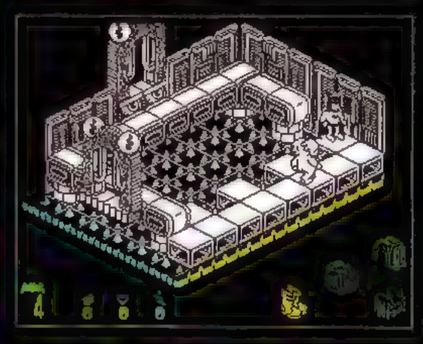
were programmed by others, although via a line-by-line translation that meant they even ended up with the same bugs. "The only major change for the 6502 version was to amend a couple of rooms that had particularly high item counts that strained the resources of the C64's weedy processor," says Jon. The only bleak coding moment Jon admits to was "putting off the scary bit of converting the *Batman* engine to handle the two characters". In the end, there was nothing left to do, and so he had to bite the bullet and get on with it. "Amazingly, it only took two hours," he says. "I was so relieved!"

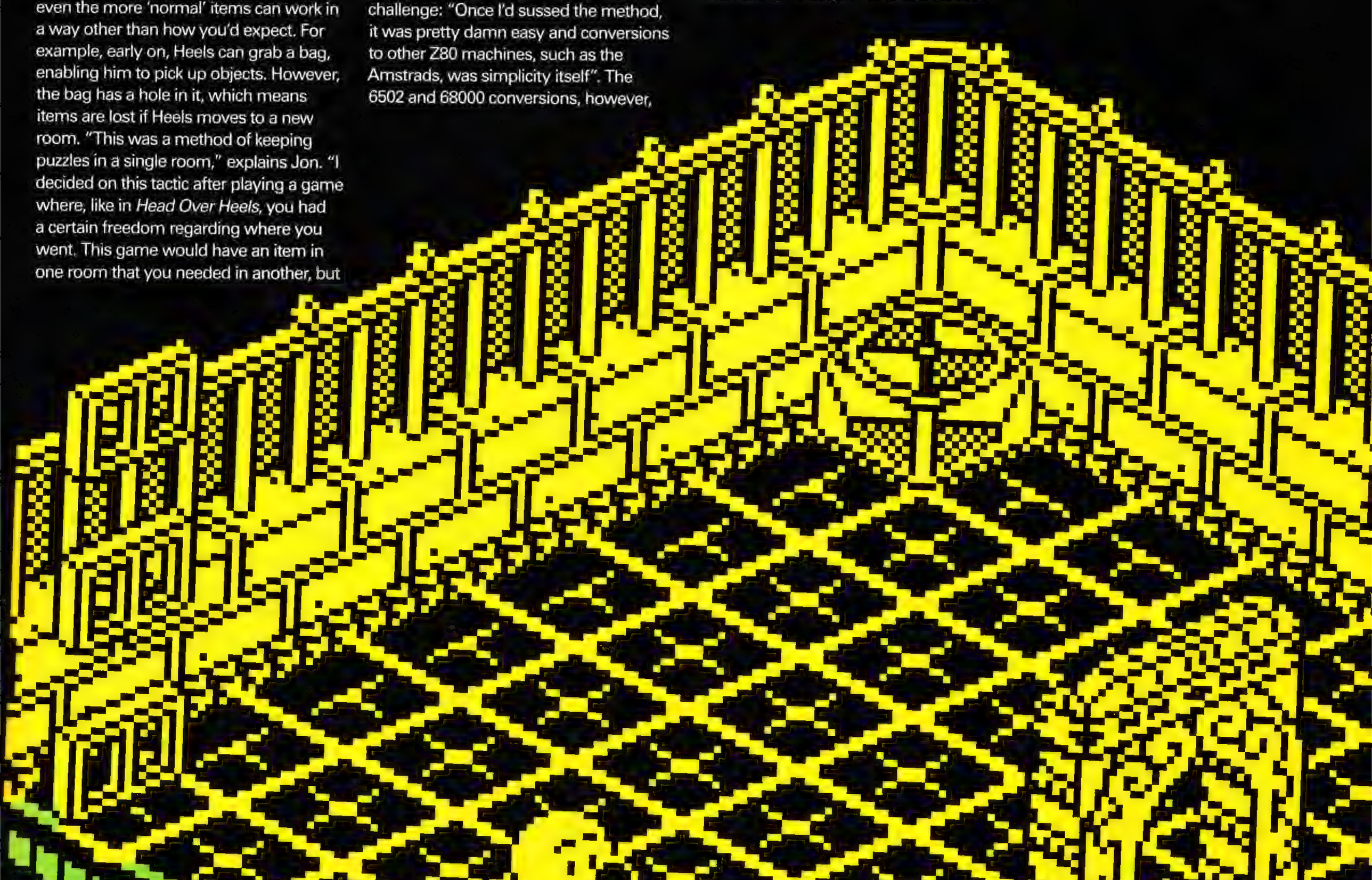
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MATCH DAY
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

BATMAN (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

MONSTER MAX
SYSTEMS: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1994





THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS

SINCLAIR'S ZX SPECTRUM WAS AN INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT HOME COMPUTER, WITH MANY CURRENT INDUSTRY DEVELOPERS CUTTING THEIR TEETH ON THE 8-BIT MACHINE. EAGER TO FIND OUT WHY IT MADE SUCH AN IMPACT ON ITS RELEASE, WE DECIDED TO TRACK DOWN SEVERAL CLASSIC SPECTRUM CODERS TO FIND OUT JUST WHAT MADE SIR CLIVE'S MACHINE SO WONDERFUL

Simon Butler

Jon Ritman

Andrew Oliver

Bill Harbison

Ste Pickford

Philip Oliver

Q. What are your fondest memories of the days when the Spectrum ruled?

Simon Butler: There are almost too many fond memories from those days. Bargain games for a few quid that were better than a lot of the dross doled out these days. By 'better' I mean value for money, and enjoyment value. Also, making up the rules as we went along – that was fun. We had no one telling us how things should be done because no one had done it before. I suppose we were the 'avant-garde'.

Matthew Smith: The fact that arcades were flourishing gave home computer games a lot of their appeal.The newness of everything made us feel we could do things that weren't possible before.

Jon Ritman: That's a hard one. If I can only pick one moment, it has to be when I introduced my very first AI program to *Match Day* – a whole ten lines of code. The rules were a) If you haven't got the ball run at it and b) If you have got the ball kick it up the pitch. Bear in mind that I was bricking it at the idea of writing AI, and you may appreciate my tears of relief when it scored against me in the first ten seconds.

Philip Oliver: Checking the charts each week as we always had games in the top ten! On a personal front... taking a gorgeous girl I'd just met into WHSmiths to show her what I did for a living. I took her to the Spectrum games shelf, looked for a *Dizzy* game and picked it up to show it to her. As I did so, a kid standing there said, "that's a great game, you should buy that". She's now my wife, but I'd like to think it's not down to that particular moment!

Ste Pickford: Probably before I started making games [1986], when I was just a fan, saving my pocket money up to buy the latest Ultimate game. The games that stick in my memory are those that managed to frighten you. That's something that doesn't happen in games these days, and perhaps can't happen with the level of detail and realism we've got now. There isn't space to use your imagination so much in modern games, which is where the strongest emotions come from, in the same way that modern movies can never be as scary or spooky as old black-and-white films.

I remember being terrified by a head that appeared in a bush in *Tir Na Nog*. I'd been walking around for hours – getting nowhere in the game – when this floating head briefly appeared then disappeared. It scared me out of my skin. I never got to the bottom of it, and it might even have been a bug, but I felt I'd encountered a taste of the primal magic of the game world.

I remember a Hewson game called *Avalon* that had a similar effect. It was very ambitious in terms of the amount it tried to move around the screen and, consequently, a bit ropey, but its flaws added to its charm and I can remember fear as I ran between floaty walled rooms chased by monsters.

Elite was another game that had a strong effect on me where I was really caught up in the game world. Police ships were terrifying, and getting caught in witch space when going through hyperspace was a genuinely frightening experience.

Bill Harbison: My fondest memory was messing around with games that I had and changing the graphics. I remember typing out a *Donkey Kong* clone that was printed in a magazine and not being impressed with the graphics (basically guiding a mouse up ladders toward a piece of cheese). I decided to do my own, complete with chest-beating Kong. I even went as far as drawing the cover for the cassette box. I also hacked into *Rebelstar Raiders* and changed all the soldiers into space marines. It kept me off the streets.

PO: We developed a way of programming the Spectrum via an Amstrad CPC6128. The electronic device was called SPlink. It enabled us to write games for the Spectrum very efficiently. We had a disk drive for storage, had the source code stored and developed on the Amstrad and the object code running on the Spectrum and no cassette tapes – except when it came to mastering the final game.

SP: Many people have fond memories of *Feud*, but I enjoyed making the Amstrad

"PROGRAMMERS COULD TAKE RISKS BECAUSE THE MONEY INVOLVED WAS SO LOW" JON RITMAN

Andrew Oliver: Every month would see new types of games released. It was a big time for creativity and originality.

David Jones: Just being able to write code when I felt like it and not having to worry about schedules or bosses. Knowing that if I thought a particular feature was amusing that I didn't have to justify it to a producer. At the time I didn't realise how valuable these things were, but I've worked on teams since then and nothing that I've been able to write as part of a team has come close to the level of reviews I managed when I was writing on my own.

Q. What has been your greatest ever Spectrum triumph and why?

Chris Stamper: In the early days we did almost everything connected with making games for the Spectrum. One of the greatest challenges was trying to find space in our already cramped office to store the latest delivery of tapes. At one time we estimated that we had over a ¼ Million tapes stored in our offices in Ashby-de-la-Zouch; they were everywhere in every room, from floor to ceiling, and even up one side of the stairs. We consider the fact that we orchestrated everything in those early days, and weren't buried alive by a mountain of tapes, to be a triumph.

SB: Though I only did the backstory, the character design and the poster design, I enjoyed my time with *Shadowfire*. I got a kick out of *NeverEnding Story* and *Hunchback: The Adventure*. I enjoyed my solo days with Ian Weatherburn, annoying though he was. We were a good team until his companion Roy Gibson reared his head, and then things went pear-shaped.

JR: *Head Over Heels* because it was so well liked and I still get fan mail thanking me for it – it was a lot of fun to design as well.

graphics more than the Spectrum ones, so I can't say that one. I'd have to say the very first Spectrum graphic I ever drew for a game. It was my first day at Binary Design, aged 16, and I was assigned to a darts game that had just started. I was using my brother's 'sprite editor' program and I drew a large animated hand holding a dart based on my own right hand. The game, *180*, was good, and did well, and the animated hand was a unique to our game – other darts games used to light up each number or segment of the board in sequence, and you had to press a button to stop it on the number you wanted. Years later, I'd meet people in the pub who'd played *180*, and I only had to waggle my right hand at them for them to recognise it from the game.

BH: *Chase HQ* was the most rewarding game I worked on, simply because technically it was superior to even the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions. Myself and John O'Brien [*Chase HQ* programmer] even received a fan letter – just one – from a very nice chap saying how much he enjoyed the game and offering his congratulations to us for doing such a great job on the conversion.

AO: It has to be *Dizzy*, but more specifically *Fantasy World Dizzy*, the third in the series. It was the last we made by ourselves. It introduced the family, had more story-like puzzles and tasks, and went straight to No 1 and remained in the charts for over a year.

DJ: I was pleased with the Windimation system as used on *Knight-Tyme*. I'd built in all sorts of tricks and data compression to cram more in to the game and as a result I'd been able to keep most of the 128K features on the 48K version.

Q. What's your favourite Spectrum game?

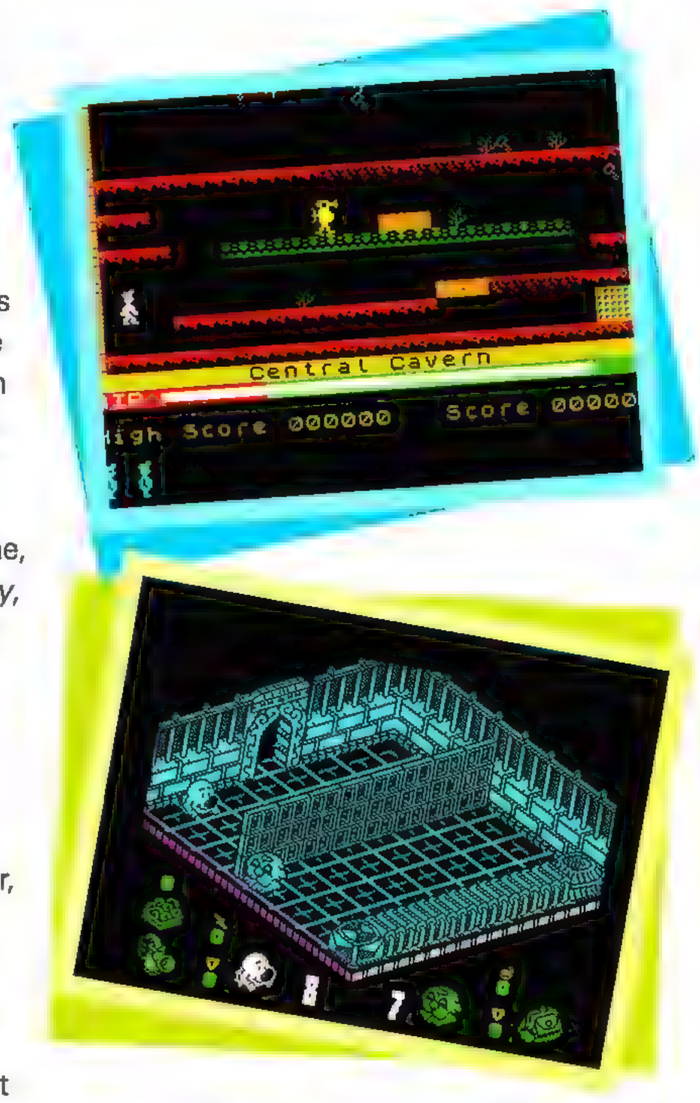
SB: There are far too many to mention. Obviously the Ultimate classics are there, but I liked *Chuckie Egg* and *Tir Na Nog*, *Zombie Zombie*, *3D Ant Attack*. It's actually impossible to pick one game and say, 'this one is better than all the others'. We were spoilt for choice.

MS: *Elite*. Squeezing a galaxy into 48k is a remarkable achievement and I like the idea of flying my own ship. I've been an urban spaceman since I was allowed to stay up and watch the Apollo missions.

JR: Where do I start – I can't pick just one, so I will list a few: *Knight Lore*, *Spindizzy*, *Xeno* (I think it was called that) and *Ant Attack*. There were several more, but I suspect the brain cells that held their names died a decade or more ago.

PO: Once the Spectrum was out we spent most of our time coding, however, I do remember seeing the isometric 3D game, *Alien 8*, by Ultimate Play the Game and being amazed at what they had squeezed out of a Spectrum. We were leading coders at the time and just couldn't understand how they were doing it.

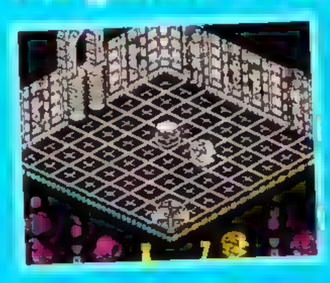
SP: Impossible to say – there were so many great games over the years. The games I played the most were *Penetrator*, *Elite*, *Knight Lore*, *Chuckie Egg* and *The Lords Of Midnight*, but there were dozens more.



» If only Head had a laser gun for destroying this wall. The game would have been a lot easier...

LOADING DISC ONE...

The games that made the legends famous

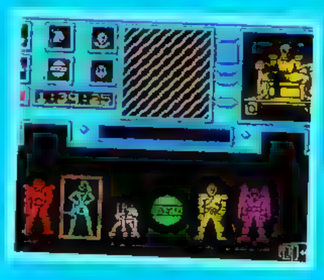


HEAD OVER HEELS (JON RITMAN)
While Ritman and Drummond had impressed the gaming world with their take on *Batman*, it was their amazing follow up that everyone remembers fondly. Filled to the rafters with incredible level design, some devilishly tricky puzzles and beautifully designed sprites, it's easy to see why Ritman is so pleased with the final product.

180 (STE PICKFORD)
While Spectrum already had its share of darts games, none of them placed you in control of a wobbly dart-throwing hand – until Pickford's *180* came along. Filled with fun touches (special mention goes to the pissing dog) *180* is an enjoyable game that's a lot better than it has any right to be. After all, darts games are supposed to be boring, right?

DIZZY (THE OLIVER TWINS)
While *Dizzy* wasn't the brothers' first title, it's easily their most important. While a little rough around the edges, *Dizzy* proved to be an extremely popular game that soon spread via word of mouth. By the time *Treasure Island Dizzy* was released, interest in the character was so great that it instantly went straight to the number one spot in the multiformat charts.

SHADOWFIRE (SIMON BUTLER)
Shadowfire proved an interesting blend of genres, and was like nothing else available on Spectrum when it was released in 1985. An icon-driven experience, you controlled six characters each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Beautifully designed and with a tight 100 minutes *Shadowfire* shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.



THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS

BITE-SIZE BIOGRAPHY OF A SPECTRUM LEGEND... PART ONE

THE OLIVER TWINS

The Oliver twins first began dabbling with games when their elder brother bought himself a Sinclair ZX81. The brothers eventually moved onto a Dragon 32, and after their first "type in" program appeared in an issue of Computer & Video Games they quickly purchased their very own BBC Model B. Their first game, Gambit, was published after the brothers won a competition on The Saturday Showthe 1984 and before long they had several games published and eventually moved on to the Amstrad CPC.

After creating several games for budget labels such as Players, the twins met the Darling brothers at the ECTS of September 1985. The collaboration with Codemasters lasted for many years, with *Dizzy* easily being one of the main highlights of both the brothers and Codemasters.

Upon leaving Codemasters in 1993, the brothers began freelancing for several big publishers including Acclaim and BGM before they eventually launched their own company, Interactive Studios, which is now known as Blitz Games.

CHRIS STAMPER

Christopher Stamper and his brother Timothy first formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd back in 1982. Initially creating coin-op conversion kits – Chris had previously taken a job at a games manufacturers where he had repaired and created old arcade boards – the brothers soon began trading as Ultimate Play the Game and released hits such as *Jetpak*, *Psst*! and *Cookie*.

While the brothers continued to have hits with games such as *Sabre Wulf* and *Knightlore*, they were becoming increasingly unhappy and were looking for a change of direction and a way to get out of the 8-bit computer market, which was becoming dominated by budget titles from the likes of Codemasters and Mastertronic.

Unbeknownst to many in the industry, the brothers had picked up a Japanese Famicom back in 1983, and after working on the machine for some eight months, eventually set up a new company called Rare that would deal exclusively with NES games. After selling off Ultimate to US Gold, the brothers moved into new premises and also set up Rare-Coin-It in the US and went to work. Rare's first NES title, *Slalom* appeared in 1987 (co-incidentally, the last year an Ultimate Play the Game title was released) and in the space of six short years it had released nearly 50 titles.

After a close relationship with Nintendo, Rare eventually announced that it had become a first party developer and would make games exclusively for Nintendo. Despite finding great success with the *Donkey Kong Country* games on the Super Nes, it was the N64 where Rare really shone and it released hit after hit after hit.

All good things must come to an end though and on the day after Rare's first and only GameCube title, *Starfox Adventures* was released, Microsoft announced that it had bought the Twycross-based developers for a cool $350 million. So far, Rare's output on both the Xbox and 360 have met with mixed reviews, but upcoming titles like Viva Pinåta and *Diddy Kong Racing* for the DS (an adaptation of its N64 hit) look like restoring Rare to its former glory.

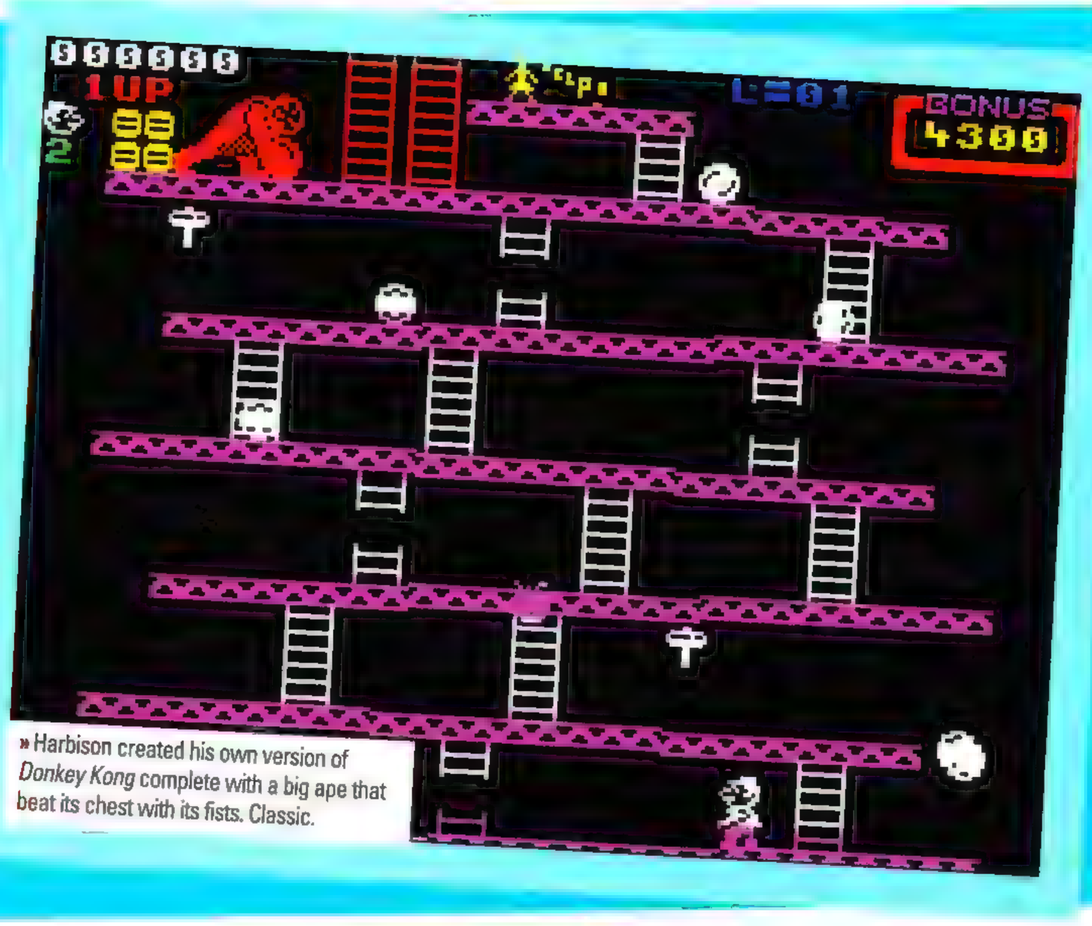
DAVID JONES

David Jones first became interested in computers when he discovered the Video Genie (a cheap Tandy TRS-80) in 1979. Intrigued by the possibilities that lay before him he immediately started coding games in basic. After being made redundant Jones decided to start working for himself and began programming for the Sinclair Spectrum, although he assembled all the actual code on his TRS-80 and transferred the data to his Spectrum, mainly because he wasn't a huge fan of the Spectrum's rubber keyboard.

A chance meeting with Albert Owen of Procom Software meant that Jones' first game, Bonkers, was eventually released in 1983. Two years later, and with Procom in financial difficulties, Owen suggested that Jones' new adventure, *Finders Keepers*, should be released under another software label.

The game was snapped up by Mastertronic and was an immediate success, selling over 300,000 copies. Jones soon got to work on a sequel and over the next three years he created three more titles.

Although he eventually moved over to consoles and worked for companies such as Psygnosis and Acclaim, Jones finally left the industry in 2002. While he's not shown any interest in returning, he has mentioned the possibility of a fifth Magic Knight game.



» Harbison created his own version of *Donkey Kong* complete with a big ape that beat its chest with its fists. Classic.

BH: Favourite games would have to be *Elite*, *Match Day II*, *Hypersports*, *Highway Encounter* and *The Great Space Race* (only kidding – remember that one?).

AO: I was always fond of Ultimate Play The Game's back catalogue. Games like *Alien 8*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* were creative and very professionally put together.

DJ: That's a difficult question as I often spent more time writing than playing. I was writing assembly code before the Spectrum was launched so I didn't spend much time playing before I began writing for it. I played more games on my TRS-80 while I was learning to program. You might as well ask a plumber what his favourite plumbing installation is. Obviously I played all the well-known titles, but it was mostly to see what everybody else was up to.

MS: It placed a powerful machine in the hands of a wider audience than ever before. The rubber keys were an ergonomic boon.

JR: It was a period we'll never have again; programmers could take risks with game design just because the money involved was so low. Many unusual ideas were born.

PO: It was like a console, because it was cheap, standardised and very accessible, but it was a fully programmable computer. The combination got kids hooked on games and then many got curious and wondered what they could do with it. This became the starting point for many of today's games programmers and a great deal of the UK's leading industry talent & figures including Phil Harrison, Head of Worldwide Game Studios for Sony.

SP: Invention. It was a time when the world of videogames wasn't dominated by licences and sequels. Developers were allowed to create videogames rather than merchandise and promotional items for Hollywood and major sports authorities. There was an incredible outpouring of ideas and concepts because of this, particularly on the Spectrum because of its more flexible architecture.

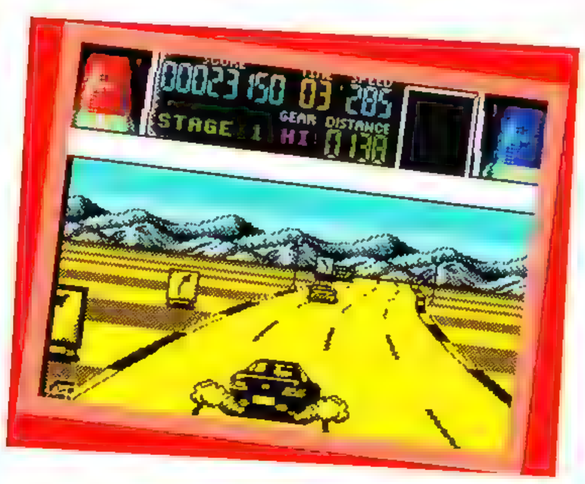
The Commodore 64 and the other American home computers had hardware features to help you make games – character screens, smooth scrolling, hardware sprites and so on. While on the face of it these features should make these computers better game machines, in practice they actually limited the range of games on those machines to only those suited to sprites floating over a scrolling character background.

Spectrum, on the other hand, merely had a bitmap screen and a processor. If you wanted to move a sprite or scroll the screen, you had to write the code yourself to do it. This had the advantage

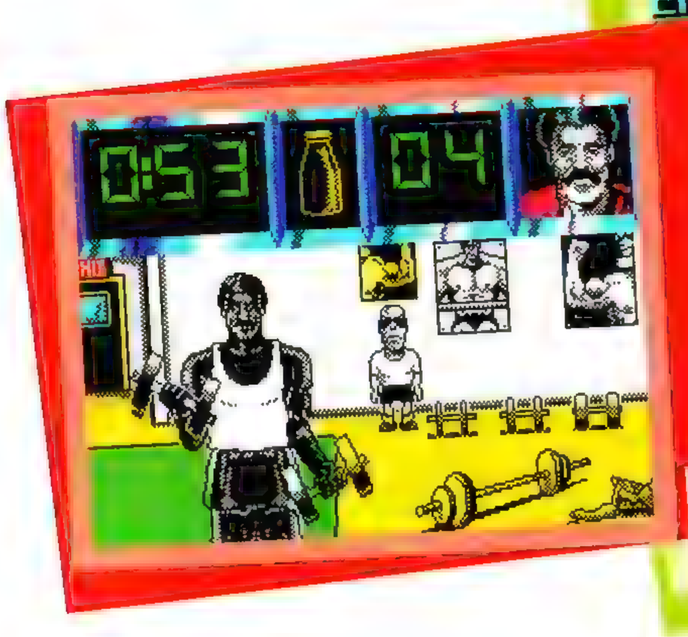
"DEAD-FLESH KEYS GAVE YOU THE SCREAMING AB-DABS, BUT IT WAS THE PLAYSTATION OF THE TIME"

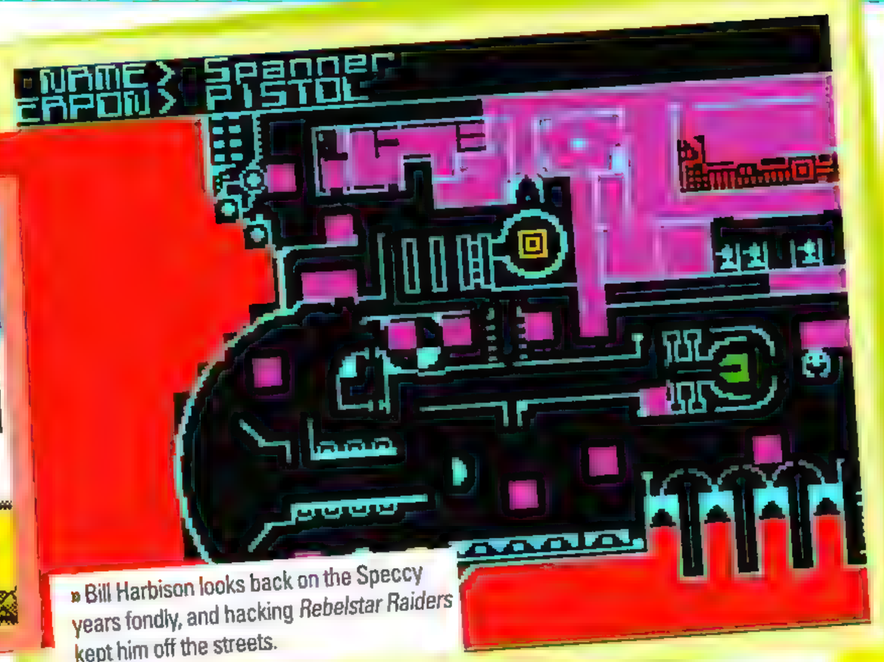
Q. What did the Spectrum contribute to the gaming world?

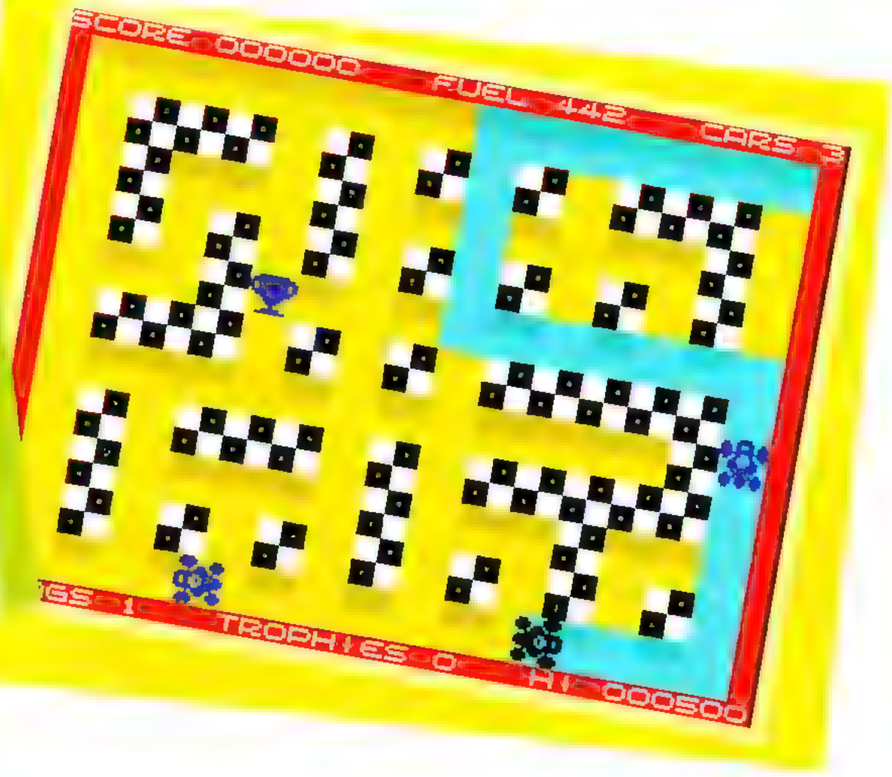
SB: Creativity and enthusiasm that has all but disappeared from the industry today. It spawned a generation of coders and artists who have gone on to some dizzying heights while others have just disappeared. It generated thousands of gamers who were passionate about games in a way that is missing with today's console titles.



» Quite possibly one of the greatest Speccy ports ever created and it's all thanks to Bill Harbison.







» Bill Harbison looks back on the Speccy years fondly, and hacking *Rebelstar Raiders* kept him off the streets.

of filtering out the worst programmers – many of whom ended up on C64 in my experience – as you had to be of a certain standard just to be able to move a sprite around the screen. It didn't impose any particular style of game, because nothing was easier to write than anything else. Sprites were hard, scrolling was hard, star fields were hard, 3D was hard – everything was equally hard.

Consequently, there were a massive variety of game styles, genres and graphical systems in use. I don't think any games machine has such an original, varied and interesting back catalogue.

BH: It contributed cheap home conversions of established arcade games and gave young programmers the chance to introduce hybrid genre games like the *Dizzy* series and the *Gargoyle* series including *Tir Na Nog*. They also brought fully 3D-shaded games to the home market ten years before the big consoles made 3D the norm.

AO: It created an environment where hobbyists could write games and sell them – something that we've sadly lost now. And it put Britain ahead in game development, as places like Japan and America never really had the same easy route from hobby to job.

DJ: Because of the limited graphics capabilities it was an ideal platform for developing gameplay, which is something that was missing in the first machines that came after the Spectrum.

Q. What was the most frustrating element of working with the Spectrum?

SB: Roy Gibson. Apart from that, I never got frustrated with the Spectrum. I loved it and still do now. It was my favourite machine and it helped me get into WAP game graphics 20 years later. I learned what I know about animation while developing for it and it gave me many, many happy hours of gaming fun.

MS: None that I can think of. I had mine slaved to a TRS-80 so none of the inconveniences affected me. The architecture of the machine was simple and well documented in the manual.

JR: Attributes!

PO: Cassette Tapes were very annoying! We always wished it was faster – but that's been the case of every computer in history! I wish Clive Sinclair had taken a royalty from all games produced like all consoles as this would have helped him stay in business and produce more cool games machines. Although the QL was flawed in so many ways – perhaps not!

SP: As an artist, the frustration was always with colour. Not only with the limit of only two colours per character square, but also with the limited palette of only eight colours – including black and white. All the other home computers could switch to more colourful modes, perhaps with bigger pixels but with more colours allowed in each character square, and a wider palette of colours. I used to dream of being able to draw something in orange. Another frustration about working on the Spectrum was using micro drives. The most unreliable storage medium ever invented. I used to have to draw every graphic in a game at least three times over the course of development because I'd lose files from the micro drives so frequently.

BH: The lack of colours on the screen and the low screen resolution. This meant that you were restricted creatively and unable to produce the quality of work you could visualise in your mind.

AO: Using the keyboard, and the tape drive. Generally people tried to write-to-write games on the Spectrum itself, which was very hard. If it crashed, you'd lose your work, and have to reload from tape. It was the few that hooked another computer to it. In our case, the Amstrad CPC, with decent keyboard and disc drive.

DJ: Very little. It had a very simple architecture and enough memory to write decent games. I'd be happy to write for it now if there was still a market for it.

> "I WISH CLIVE SINCLAIR HAD TAKEN A ROYALTY FROM ALL GAMES PRODUCED AS THIS WOULD HAVE HELPED HIM STAY IN BUSINESS" PHILIP OLIVER

SB: I have nothing but fond memories of the Speccy. The colours, or lack of, was annoying, but overall it was my machine of choice when developing or gaming.

Q. And the most rewarding?

MS: Being able to produce high-res, colorful graphics was the best part, compared to other systems at the time. The first machine I saw was an Apple 2, which was out of the price range of most British people. It was also nice to know that Spectrum games did no harm to the Balance of Payments Defecit (British industry was collapsing at the time).

JR: Simplicity of dealing directly with the hardware and the freedom to avoid any sort of operating system.

PO: The success of the Spectrum meant so many people had games machines. Before the Spectrum only real geeks had computers; when the Spectrum came along even girls had computers!

SP: I used to work on multiformat games – for Spectrum, Amstrad and C64. The Spectrum version ended up being the main version – the version you wanted to play. Because of the technical difficulties

LOADING DISC TWO...

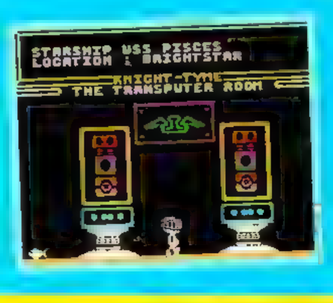
The games that made the legends famous

[redacted]

Along with *R-Type*, *Chase HQ* on Spectrum is one of the greatest coin-op conversions the machine has ever received. Boasting highly detailed visuals, wonderfully authentic gameplay and great speech (on the 128K version), *Chase HQ* proved that Sir Clive's humble machine was more than capable of mimicking a coin-op that cost thousands of pounds.

JETPAC (CHRIS STAMPER)

You never would have realised that this was the first game that the Stamper brothers released. Beautiful presentation, gorgeously detailed sprites and fast, frenetic gameplay all combined to create a dazzling debut that's still a dream to play today. Rumours persist of the game being updated and released for Xbox Live Arcade, but, so far, both Microsoft and Rare are keeping schtum.



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franchise, it just so happens to be the very best (especially if you can track down the superior Spectrum 128K version). Boasting plenty of new characters, a diverse range of locations and an amazing soundtrack by David Whittaker, *Knight-Tyme* is a title that no Spectrum owner should be without.

THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS

» Not every game Simon Butler worked on was amazing, as *Highlander* proves.

» *Bonkers* was David Jones' first published game and was a clone of *Frogger*.

of working on the Spectrum, it tended to attract the better programmers, so that was one reason, but the Amstrad was too slow, and the C64 looked crap with its washed-out colours. The Spectrum also had the nicest keyboard for playing games on. So for all those reasons the Spectrum version of the games I worked on was always the one I played the most.

"FEW OF US WERE RICH ENOUGH TO OWN THEM ALL AS KIDS, SO THE HOME COMPUTER WE HAD WAS OUR FAVOURITE" STE PICKFORD

BITE-SIZE BIOGRAPHY OF A SPECTRUM LEGEND... PART TWO

SIMON BUTLER

Since his introduction to the industry when he worked on his first title, *Pedro's Garden* (1983) for the ill-fated Imagine Software, Butler has worked on many titles across multiple formats. Games such as *The Neverending Story, Hunchback: The Adventure, Total Recall, Worms* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* are to name but a few. He's worked for such publishers as Ocean, Team 17, Vicarious Visions, Probe, Magnetic Fields and Atari.

JON RITMAN

The legendary Ritman appeared on the scene in 1981 when he released his first game on the Sinclair ZX81, *Namtir Raiders* (his surname spelt backwards). He has created several games that were converted to other platforms such as the Amstrad CPC, C64, MSX, Amstrad PCW and Atari ST. His portfolio consists of classics such as *Match Day I & II, Head Over Heels* and *Batman*. He's worked for Artic, Ocean and Rare/Titus.

STE PICKFORD

Maradona had the 'hand of God', but Ste had the 'hand of *180*' – an animation he created for the darts game. His brother John and he have had a roller-coaster ride in the industry, from forming Zippo Games and developing titles for Rare on the NES to being owned by Rare, moving to Software Games, and then leaving to form Zed Two (a nod to Zippo). In 2002 they had to sell to richer neighbours, but Zed Two closed in 2004. They've since formed Zee-3 and are self-publishing their games online. Their most recent title was *Magnetic Billiards* on iOS.

BILL HARBISON

Another great mind from the Ocean generation, Harbison worked on the amazing *Chase HQ*, as well as *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge, Jurassic Park* and *Lethal Weapon*. From Ocean he moved on to Time Warner Interactive, Candle Light and finally worked for Warthog through a company called Platinum Interactive. After some unpleasant times, he spent a few years out of the industry only to return 18 months ago to Rockpool Games.

BH: Because there were limitations on the graphical output of the machine, it was all the more impressive if you managed to use the ink and the colour attribute to your advantage and create an attractive loading screen. I remember being in a computer shop when *Chase HQ* was released. I was stood behind two kids who were watching the game load in from tape and when the screen came up on the TV one turned to the other and said, 'Wow! That is one righteous loading screen.' That was funny and at least he could count.

AO: Getting things working really quickly. Although writing assembler is very slow, you could spend a day, and get something moving around the screen quite quickly. There were also lots of 'hacker' type tricks that would make things very fast. Things like 'self modifying code' – that really is a no-no, but in those days, if it worked, it was cool. And even in code, it felt innovative.

DJ: Well, there was plenty of money floating about for those of us who could write for it! Most rewarding though was seeing the reviews after I'd written something that I was pleased with and seeing that other people liked my efforts.

Q. Why do you think the Spectrum remains so popular with gamers?

CS: The gameplay. Once you got past the technical aspects of doing what you wanted and because the graphics, although simple, took a major effort to make them great, you simply honed the gameplay. What really made the games special was that a larger percentage of the overall effort went into this; it made for some truly great and imaginative games.

SB: Because it's British. I've no idea really. There just seemed to be a glut of games out there with hundreds more just waiting to be released every month. Crash was our bible and there never seemed to be enough space for all the reviews. With no Internet it was the only salvation if you needed a game tip or even better a map. It was small and black and sexy, and apart from the horrible dead-flesh keys, which gave you the screaming ab-dabs after a while – it was the PlayStation of the time. It kicked ass over C64 as far as I was concerned. There was a certain pompous attitude about Commodore development. Even though I did graphics for many C64 titles I preferred the Spectrum. You drew something, and if you were a halfway decent artist then it looked like what you intended. C64 graphics? Although he's one of my all-time favourite sprites, just look at Bruce Lee. I rest my case.

MS: It can only be the rubber keyboard. Seriously though, modern games have a sameyness about them. This is just a phase, as the current push towards physics acceleration will open up new avenues.

JR: It isn't. Just a few odd people think it is.

PO: It kick started the UK games industry and was 100% British from the quirky but brilliant entrepreneur Sir Clive Sinclair.

SP: Hmm. Nostalgia, I guess. It seems a pretty even split among people I meet – Spectrum or C64, with the odd Amstrad fan, and I've re-enacted the playground arguments in the office a few times. Very few of us were rich enough to own them all as kids, so whichever home computer we had was our favourite.

BH: It's because the Spectrum played such a big part in the lives of a whole generation of kids growing up in the Eighties and Nineties. It was there when they were growing up and we always look back rapturously on our childhood and how the sun was brighter and the grass was greener. It wasn't, but that's how we recall it.

AO: It created so many new original gamers and started up the industry, certainly for the British.

DJ: It has to be the gameplay because it isn't the graphics. Well done Sinclair for putting it out there with the colour clash and everything though, because if they'd waited to develop a non-colour clash machine it might have missed the market and we'd all have been stuck with the Commodore 64. I could write 6502 code as

» The superb *Sabre Wulf*, easily one of Chris Stamper's finest gaming moments.

well, but I had the set up for Z80 so I'd have been behind on writing my games and might not even have got around to it.

Q. Do you think bedroom coders can still exist in the industry?

SB: They'll never get rich, but as long as they enjoy what they do, turn out quality product, and entertain people then that's all that matters. The bastards who wear the suits have all-but destroyed the UK game development scene and have ensured that the days of the bedroom coders or the cottage industry development teams are over.

MS: They can, and with the internet, there is no reason why they can't flourish, in my opinion. The mainstream media has a tendency to devote all its column inches and airtime to big PR stunts from the established giants, but the specialist press will always give independents a fair crack of the whip.

JR: While not actually programming in my bedroom, it's only a few feet away. There are a few left who tend to work on very small projects such as embedded games and mobile games.

PO: Very tough, but *Darwinia* is one of those rare exceptions that proves it's just possible. But what's better these days is that people can realistically choose making games as a serious career and there are many large professional companies that they can join to do so. And unlike the "bedroom coders" they don't need to be masters of multiple disciplines and risk everything!

SP: I hope so, as I've become one. I think the mainstream videogame industry has lurched too far toward making only slick, high-budget, blockbuster-type products, and hasn't encouraged enough original, lower budget titles to come through to provide the ideas for the blockbusters of the future. There are creative developers within the industry who can't express themselves as part of a 60-man team working night and day to draw a thousand new kits for *FIFA 2007*, or to program the gearshift simulator for licensed car #37 in racing game #58. The only option for these people is to leave the industry to do something more rewarding, or to make games as an 'Indie'. So many developers are turning to Indie development that I think Indies and bedroom coders are going to become an accepted part of the world of videogames providing the stream of new ideas we used to get from regular games in the Spectrum days, but which seems to be missing from the modern videogame industry.

BH: In some ways it's easier for bedroom coders with the introduction of the Internet. People can get the tools and resources they need, they can get advice on programming for all the way through the project, and when completed they can sell it direct to the customer. I don't think it's enough to make anyone a millionaire, but it can be a good living.

AO: It's difficult. The tools and platforms aren't really in place for it. It doesn't feel cool, when the market has so many huge, flashy games around. The gulf between what you can achieve on your own and what's in the market place seems too big. But, people must try, and we'd like to encourage that spirit to return.

DJ: No. Well, maybe, but they'd have to be clever as they would need to develop a lot more code to even get a simple game going. Maybe a company could produce a series of supported libraries that include a decent renderer, a resource system, external chipset interfaces etc. The best bet I see for a potential bedroom coder is to use Direct X to write the best game demo software they can and then use that as part of their CV to get in with a small development team.

Q. What do you think of the Spectrum games that are still being released by the likes of Jonathan Cauldwell?

SB: Unfortunately, I don't play any Spectrum games these days. I know precious little about the current Spectrum games, but friends who are 'in the know' tell me great things, so I suppose I should check them out.

JR: I haven't. I don't have a working Spectrum now but I do intend to get an emulator for my DS, and perhaps a GP2x if the pennies stretch that far.

JR: I had no idea.

PO: Sadly I had little time to play Spectrum games in the mid-Eighties, now I have a company of 175 staff and a family – I'm afraid I don't have any time! But if Jonathan is looking for a rewarding long-term career in a stable, friendly company of like-minded, skilled game developers he should get in touch.

SP: No, I've not played any of them. I think it's insane. The Spectrum is a difficult machine to write for, and incredibly limited. Why put yourself through the pain of making a Spectrum game now when you don't need to? If you're talented enough to make a finished Spectrum game, then you're talented enough to make a game that other people might play. Why hide away on a dead format?

BH: I'd not heard of Jonathan so I decided to Google him. It looks like a lot of fun, but I'm not sure how popular it is.

AO: I haven't played any of them. Way too busy. I applaud people who make this kind of effort, and hope these people get jobs making games. Even though it's hard work in the games industry, it's cool going to work and being able to create new games, and although some of the originality has been lost, there's many things like Live Arcade that should help bring it back. We're feeling very good about how the quality of games is getting better all the time, and we're being compared more and more to Hollywood. But we can overtake films.

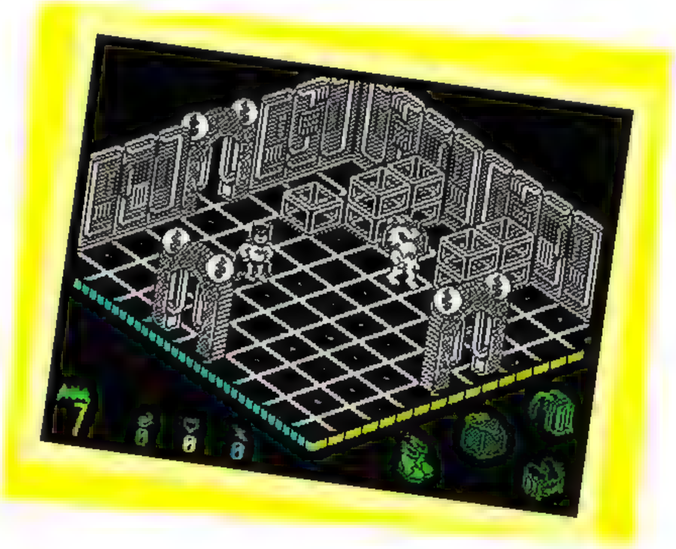
DJ: I wish them the best of luck with it and no, I haven't played them.

Q. What has been the defining moment of your career?

CS: With regards to the Spectrum, peeling the cellophane off the very first copy of *Jetpac* that we got back from duplicators, seeing it load, playing the game, and knowing that this was a real and saleable product was something I will never forget.

SB: I remember many years ago that Gary Bracey ran a computer store in Liverpool long before he became my lord and master at Ocean, and I called in with Ian Weatherburn to buy some blank

"THE BASTARDS WHO WEAR THE SUITS HAVE DESTROYED THE UK GAME DEVELOPMENT SCENE; THE DAYS OF THE BEDROOM CODERS ARE OVER" SIMON BUTLER



» *Batman* was the first game that Ritman worked on with friend Bernie Drummond.

» *Knight Lore* was Sabreman's first isometric adventure

discs. Gary's shop was cram-packed with kids, and he got me to autograph some copies of *Shadowfire*. While far from 'defining', it stuck with me. It was one of the first times I met Gary, and although it embarrassed me somewhat being put on the spot like that it made me realise that kids really enjoyed what I did for a living.

I recently got a job with a mobile games company working in France and the boss rattled off games I had worked on saying that I was one of the guys who was instrumental in him getting into the industry. Contrary to what my father always thought, maybe I haven't wasted the last 25 years of my life after all.

MS: It must be the excitement in the Bug Byte office when I brought in a half-finished *Manic Miner*, or maybe it was when I was in London receiving a Golden Joystick award. I have dabbled in other jobs, but nothing has ever generated this kind of enthusiasm and appreciation.

JR: *Match Day* – six months after a brief conversation with David Ward of Ocean (that I barely recalled) he phoned to say, 'that football game you were going to write, did you do it?' I then confirmed it was a couple of weeks from completion and he offered me a huge amount for it – well it seemed huge at the time.

PO: Yikes - that's a tough question. To be honest our success has come through lots of small steps over the last 25 years. Significant steps were getting hooked on *Pac-Man* ('81), Winning "The Saturday Show" ('83), Meeting the Darling Brothers ('85), as they were just starting Codemasters and *Dizzy*. After that we set up Blitz and everything has been planned and worked for, sadly no major lucky breaks, but we're still in the game! I guess we've been very fortunate to hire a lot of very talented and loyal staff that we now treat as "part of the family". More details of our early days can be found at www.OliverTwins.com.

"I THINK I'VE MADE EVERY MISTAKE IT'S POSSIBLE TO MAKE. I REGRETTED THEM AT THE TIME, BUT REGRET FADES" STE PICKFORD

» A little game called *Match Day* proved the defining moment of Jon Ritman's shining career.

SP: I hope it hasn't happened yet. I've never had a big hit game, and never made a lot of money, both of which I'm still working on. *Laughs* I'm still making games, and learning with every game I work on. The Pickford Brothers' latest game – *Naked War* – is the best game we've ever made, and I'm confident that the next game we write after that will be even better. I'm looking to the future, not the past.

BH: I think it was being invited with a few workmates to the press premiere of *Jurassic Park* at Leicester Square – it was certainly an experience.

AO: Probably having over ten UK number ones with Codemasters, and then setting up our own company.

DJ: I don't know really. I have a number of different careers. Maybe I'll knock out some more games and have a defining moment some time in the future. However, finding out from a member of the Crash review team that *Finders Keepers* would have been a Crash Smash (90% or greater overall review score), but that they were told to knock the review down to 89 ½ per cent because Mastertronic didn't advertise with them was very interesting. Sort of a defining moment, as I hadn't realised until that point that there was a certain amount of 'massaging' of the review scores based on the level of publisher advertising. It meant that I knew my review scores were always accurate or lower than they should be, but it also meant that I could take other high reviews with a pinch of salt if that publisher had a lot of adverts in that issue of the magazine.

Q. And finally, what was the biggest mistake of your career, if any?

SB: Probably not learning one of the many 3D packages out there. I wouldn't have bounced around the industry as much as I have, and would have had a lot more stability in my life. But I was a 2D guy back then and that's what I am today. I'm the last dinosaur.

JR: I should have started up my own company early and published myself.

SP: I can't really pick anything. That's not to say that I haven't made any mistakes – I have. I think I've made every mistake it's possible to make in this business. I regretted them at the time, but with hindsight the regret fades. Every mistake I've made has taught me something which has helped me later.

I'm pretty good at making games now, after 20 years, because I've learnt the hard way how not to make games. I've made mistakes in business and missed opportunities, but every mistake has led me to where I am today. Okay, I'm skint, but I'm making the best game I've ever made, and enjoying every minute of it, and I'm looking confidently to the future.

BH: Leaving the industry a few years ago after the local job scene dried up. I spent 18 months doing a proper job, and hated it. Thankfully, I'm back in the industry working at Rockpool Games in Manchester with a few of my old colleagues, some of whom I've known for over 18 years.

RETRO GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

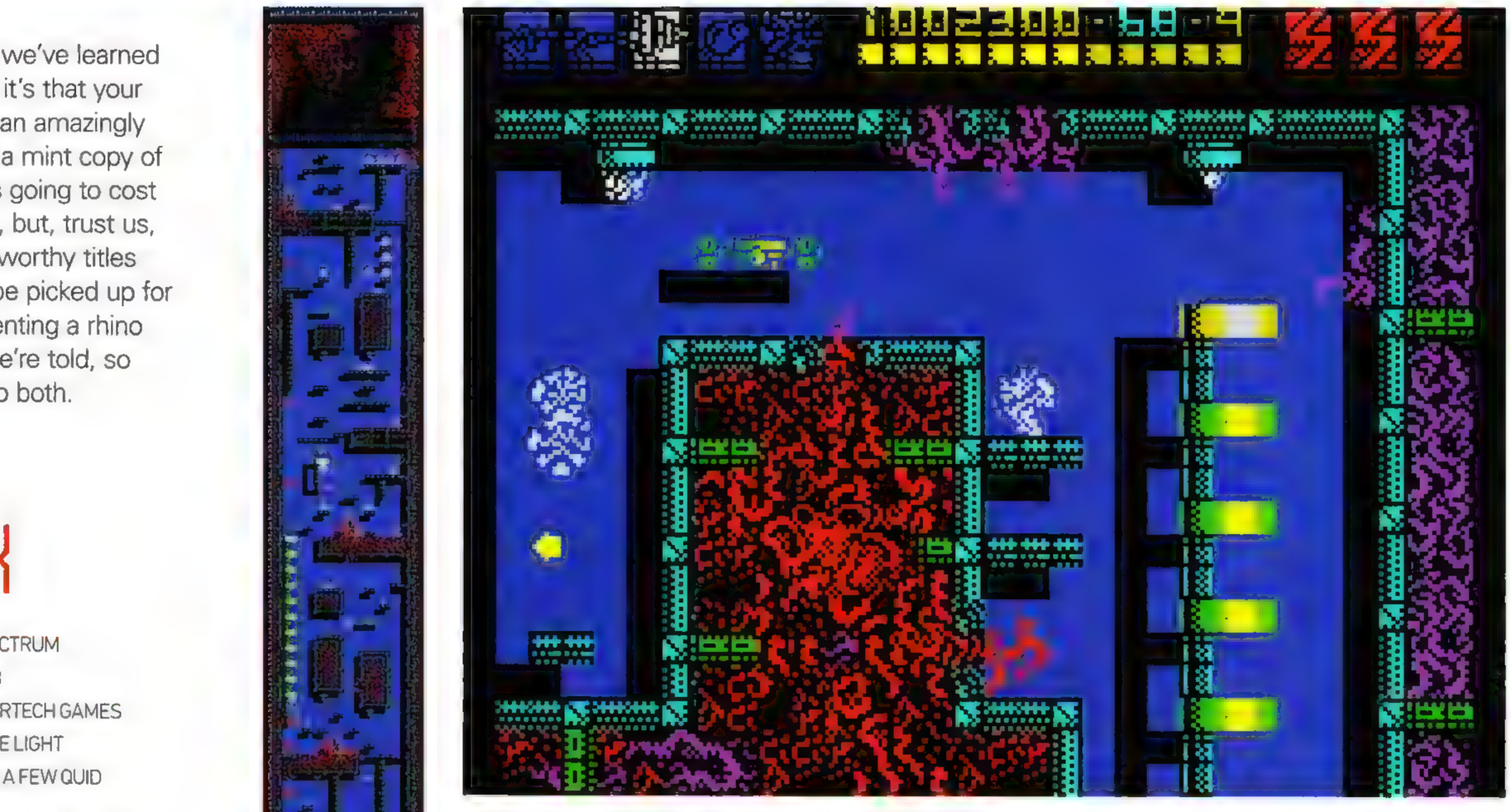
If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but, trust us, there are plenty of worthy titles out there that can be picked up for less than a fiver. Hiring a mercenary or renting a rhino for the weekend can be a costly affair, we're told, so *Rex* makes a pocket-friendly alternative to both.

REX

SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
RELEASED: 1988
PUBLISHER: MARTECH GAMES
DEVELOPER: THE LIGHT
EXPECT TO PAY: A FEW QUID

It beggars belief that we still go out and buy games, when munificent websites such as worldofspectrum.org are providing titles like *Rex* for free (with permission, we might add). Quick, slick and stylised, *Rex* made enthralling playability on a simple machine look easy, nailing players to the joystick in a way that's seldom seen in today's wintry gaming climate. Oozing colour and detailed animation, The Light's combined debut and finale was a sure winner even before the addictive gameplay had you hooked.

Although the back story isn't as relevant now as it was in 1988 (we suppose environmentalism never goes out of fashion, but toward the end of the Eighties, even Mrs Thatcher pretended to care about the ozone layer), the anthropomorphic eco-warrior took to his guns in order to prevent the oh-so-callous human race from making use of a megalithic, contaminating power station built on his home planet. Our horny hero enters in good assassin fashion through the underground catacombs that all denizens of wrong doing invariably build their 'impenetrable' fortresses upon.



» Got stuck in the catacombs? Try this code: 8980898909608208 (cheater)

Chocked-full of gun turrets and armed minions (despite heavy munitions and power stations being a volatile combination), *Rex* treks his way to the top of the tower via a variety of routes, depending on which direction tickles the player's fancy.

Whichever path is taken, rest assured the stalwart rhino will need a calm and analytical approach to thwarting the humans and their defences to make it to the tower, though hanging around in strategic contemplation is a sure way to get him shot. *Rex* is a most difficult game.

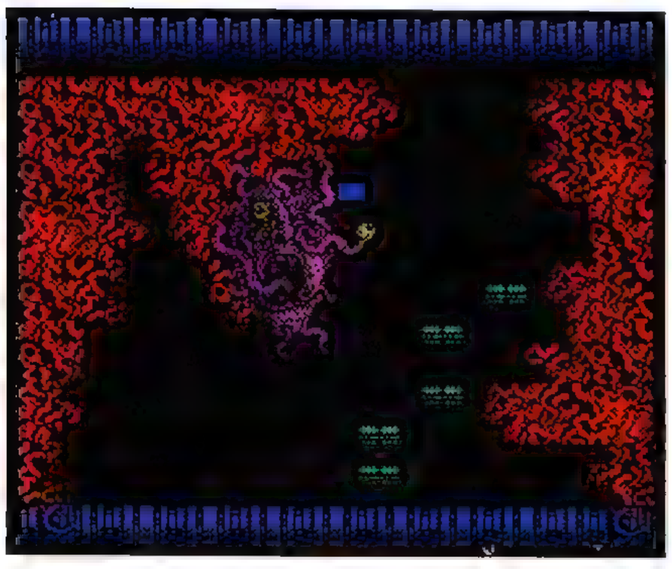
One of the most impressive features has rarely been reproduced with any alacrity: the rapid hit bonus. Shooting down an enemy soldier is fine, but keep piling the bullets in and he'll keep staggering backwards, being peppered like so much fillet steak until you finally let up on the trigger – as much fun as it is unnecessary. It does, however, exemplify the anguish and frustration *Rex* must have been feeling to embark on such a righteous mission – to save his planet from pollution.

As luck would have it, he came armed with enough firepower to, well... bring down a power station. By collecting 'power bubbles' left by bested enemies, his weapons output is granted progressively destructive might. Used in conjunction with a personal force shield (that depletes during use), he is more than a match for the towering fortress, assuming the player is bold enough of character to endure the mammoth task.

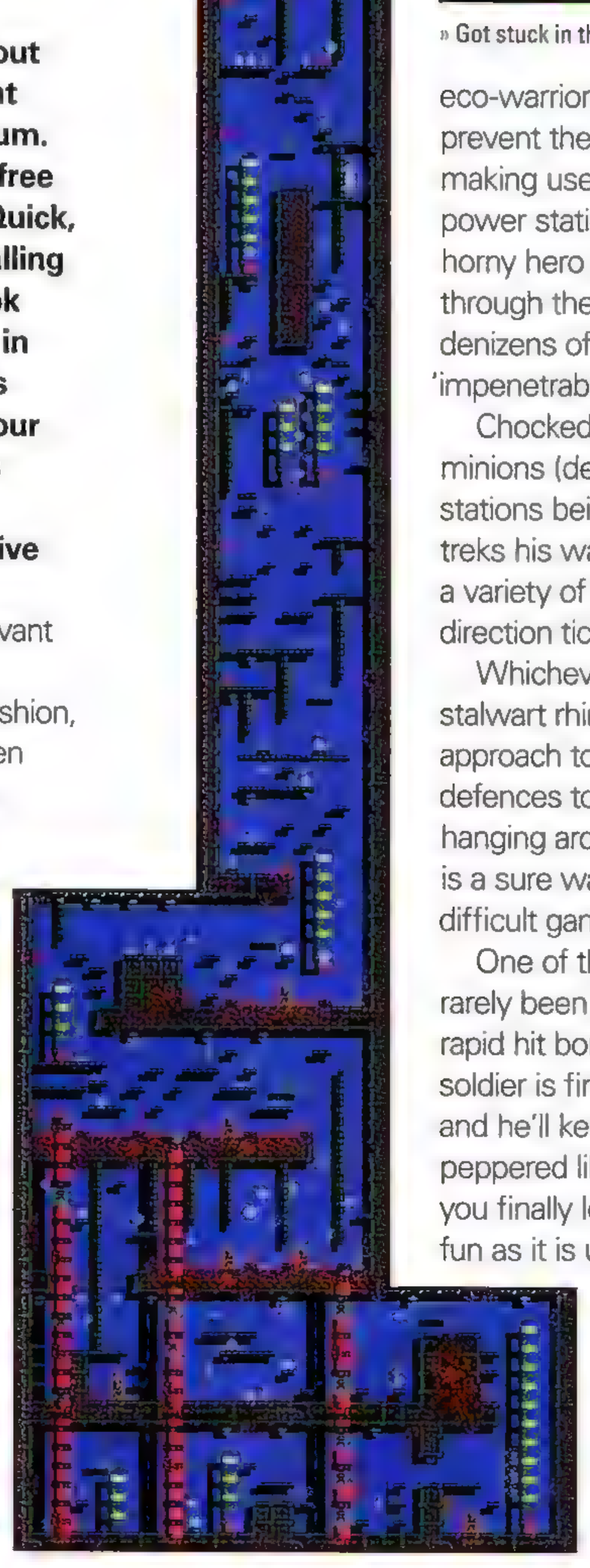
The game is split nicely in two (originally making use of side B on the tape): the mines that lead to the base of the structure, then the ascension of the tower itself. This second level, of sorts, was accessed by an ingenious 16 digit anti-cheat code that told the game engine in what condition you had completed the first phase (how many lives remained, etc). Despite following the same style of invigorating gameplay, the new enemies and vastly different architecture on Side B flavoured the proceedings in a whole new way, adding immensely to *Rex*'s longevity.

All in all, *Rex* is a truly superb Spectrum blaster that really needs to be experienced by everyone, regardless of their 8-bit preference, while its pick up and play nature remains timeless. You are not allowed to call yourself a platformer fan until you've at least seen the tower in this marvellous monster mash.

» Game over; world saved. Don't you just love it when a plan comes together?



» There are some gruesome looking enemies in *Rex*.



» The Living Tower is mighty high, and something unpleasant waits at the top...

THE TRAP DOOR

THERE IS SOMETHING DOWN THERE...

PUBLISHER: PIRANHA
RELASED: 1986
GENRE: GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
FEATURED HARDWARE: ZX SPECTRUM
EXPECT TO PAY: A FEW QUID

HISTORY

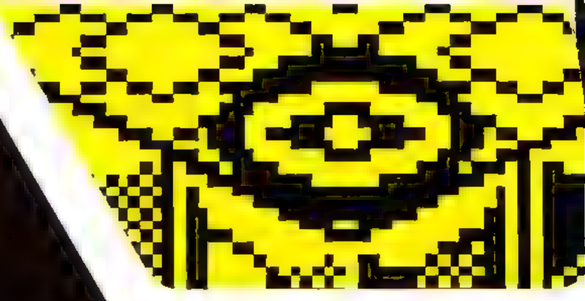
Berk's aghast expression says it all really. The Thing who lives upstairs has called for a can of worms, causing chaos down in the basement. Berk opens the trap door to release some worms, only for an evil spirit to escape from the depths below, while Drutt, Berk's spider-like pet, starts eating the damn worms, sucking them into his mouth like pieces of spaghetti. Meanwhile, beneath the trap door, a cast of weird and wonderful characters are waiting to emerge, including a fire-breathing robot and a bug-eyed thing with a penchant for stamping on stuff. "A joke's a joke," as Berk once said in the animated TV show on which the videogame is based, "but this goes way beyond the realms of light entertainment."

I don't remember much about *The Trap Door* TV series. When it first aired in 1984 I was still in short trousers and a lot of the warped humour whizzed right over my head. Don Priestley's game, on the other hand, made a much greater impression on me and I can clearly recall certain scenes in glorious Specnicolor: Berk boiling 'smileys' in a cauldron; Berk filling a vat with oversized eyeballs; Berk chasing after a freaky purple bird, trying to catch falling eggs in a frying pan. While the various puzzles were devilishly inventive, it was the super-sized graphics that made the game so memorable. Don Priestley used this bold visual style before and after *The Trap Door*, but never to better effect. In terms of looks it's as close to the TV show as you could ever hope to see on the Spectrum.

Going back to the game today is a slightly shocking experience, not because it hasn't aged well, but because it's actually better than I remember it. Thanks to its great graphics, smart gameplay and superb presentation, this quirky classic still manages to leave me open-mouthed – a bit like poor old Berk.

1200

SPECTRUM 31



When it comes to Spectrum success stories, no developer was as big, or as respected as Ultimate Play The Game. Based in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, its founders, Tim and Chris Stamper started off in the arcade industry, before plying their trade on the ZX Spectrum. The results were some of the finest videogames to ever appear on the machine, ranging from the arcade thrills of Jetpac, to the ground-breaking visuals of Knight Lore. Now known as Rare, it has worked for both Nintendo and Microsoft, and remains an important developer. This is its story...

IN BRIEF

Originally formed in 1982 by brothers, Chris and Tim Stamper, Ultimate is one of Britain's videogame success stories and is still thriving 30 years later. Initially creating games for the ZX Spectrum, Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd (as it was then known) later became Ultimate Play the Game, and finally, Rare. Along the way, the Twycross-based developers formed a close partnership with Nintendo and had a string of hit titles across a wide range of its consoles. Now owned by Microsoft, Rare is currently working on Kinect and new Xbox 360 titles

Ultimate Play The Game

If you owned an 8-bit computer in the Eighties, then chances are you had at least one game that boasted the famous blue and green logo of Ultimate Play The Game on its loading screen. If you owned any of the Nintendo systems from the NES up to the N64, chances are you played more than a few games bearing the Rare logo. And if you're one of the lucky few to nab an Xbox 360... well, you see where this is going.

Most developers are lucky to rise to the top in one era of gaming without stumbling or being swallowed by a faceless rival. And while Ultimate may now be a part of the Microsoft empire, the company still retains its own identity and acclaim. But, as with most of these stories, things began on a much smaller scale. It was 1980 and the 21-year-old Chris Stamper, then studying physics and electronics at Loughborough University, was bowled over by the emerging world of micro technology – and in particular the way that computers could be used to control things on the screen.

With off-the-shelf home computers still a pipe dream he assembled his own from a kit – the RCA CDP1802 – the fastest machine around at the time. Teaching himself how to program, Stamper created a traffic light management system and was hooked. Quitting his degree course, he took a job working on the circuit boards of early arcade machines, converting *Space Invaders* into *Galaxian* and fixing bugs. When the ZX80 arrived on the high street, he snapped one up and spent two years mastering the intricacies of games programming. Finally convinced he had a handle on how to create better games than the early commercial efforts, Chris joined forces with his younger brother Tim, his girlfriend (and later wife) Carole Ward, and an old college friend, John Latchbury. They even had some transatlantic connections thanks to their arcade work, with Joel Hochberg of Miami-based Coin-It Inc as their American contact.

With these basic pieces in place, in 1982 the group formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd. Funding their early growth by selling pre-made arcade conversion kits, they worked in the house next door to their parent's newsagents in glamorous Ashby-de-la-Zouch, before beginning trading under the title Ultimate Play the Game. Chris and John concentrated on the programming, while Tim and Carole handled graphics. It was a small but efficient set-up. In an interview with Keith Ainsworth's Retrogamer fanzine, the Stamper brothers looked fondly back on these formative years.

"They were great times. When we had deliveries we would store goods in the toilet, on the stairs, in our bedrooms. We had no money - when bills came in we all chipped in. The electricity one was always huge but we made sure that was paid first."

After six months of mounting debts, in May 1983 Ultimate struck gold with its first commercial release – a single-screen shooting game for the ZX Spectrum called *Jetpac*. In an era when computer owners gobbled up any new software, as much for the novelty as for playability, *Jetpac* delivered both in spades. Fast, furious and enormous fun, it played more like the arcade machines Chris had worked on as a young man than a first effort on a new format, and it set a high benchmark

bona-fide fanbase. And if Ultimate kept the press at arm's length, the opposite was true of the people who played their games.

"We could have expanded, like some companies did, with a large fan club and giveaways and posters to buy" Tim told *Crash*, "And we could have said, 'If you like Ultimate, buy the games, buy sweatshirts,' but in fact we gave them all away. If anyone asked us for a sweatshirt or a cap we said 'well, you can have it'. We were just interested in seeing the software out there and getting fair reviews."

The games kept coming, and so did the innovations. *Sabre Wulf* was the first Spectrum game to abandon the traditional £5.50 price point, leaping to a then unimaginable £9.95. The idea was to try and stop people letting friends tape the games, assuming that if people paid more for something, they'd be less willing to let someone else swipe it for free. The price hike didn't harm *Sabre Wulf's* sales though, and higher prices soon became standard for all Spectrum software.

It was their next release that truly defined Ultimate for many gamers though. While 3D graphics weren't completely new *Knight Lore*, the sequel to *Sabre Wulf*, took the fuzzy, featureless look of early isometric pioneers like *Ant Attack* and turned it up to eleven. With large, bold sprites and intricate room designs, it isn't overstating the case to say that *Knight Lore's* Filmation graphics engine did for gaming what sound did for the movies. It opened up the gameworld, allowed gamers freedom of movement in all directions, and gave designers the chance to devise ever-more fiendish challenges. It's safe to say that without *Knight Lore*, there'd be no *Tomb Raider*, and modern gaming would look very different. And yet, amazingly, *Knight Lore* was finished before the 2D action of *Sabre Wulf*. Showing their now customary business acumen, the Stamper's realised that the market wasn't yet ready.

"If we released *Knight Lore* we wouldn't have sold *Sabre Wulf*", Tim told *Crash*, "There was a little bit of careful planning in there. We just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind." And so it came to pass that a defining classic of the 8-bit era sat on the shelf until the time was right.

Once the 3D floodgate was opened, there was no stopping Ultimate. *Alien 8*, *Nightshade* and *Pentagram* all used the same viewpoint to great effect. By the time the western adventure *Gunfright* came around in 1986, reviewers were starting to express misgivings about Ultimate's reliance on their Filmation technique, and Chris and Tim were realising that they'd pushed the Spectrum as far as it could go. While most of the Britsoft publishers saw their future in the imminent arrival of 16bit computers like the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, the Stampers had their eyes on a different prize. Thanks to their arcade contacts, Chris and Tim had been following the development of consoles coming out of Japan. In fact, as far back as 1983, when *Jetpac* was state of the art, they were tinkering with a NES console, and figuring out how to make games for it.

"We knew a market was going to boom in Japan and America, and we set Rare up to handle that", said Tim in 1987, "Obviously we didn't want to give too much away because we needed time to develop our associations before they really became aware of it."

For a company seen as quintessentially English, it was a bold but shrewd move for the pair. Retaining a stake in Ultimate, they sold off the label to US Gold and moved over to their new company – Rare. And as Ultimate withered away, offering only the *Collected Works* compilation as a farewell, for most British gamers the secretive whiz kids seemed to vanish from the scene.

In actual fact, having convinced Nintendo to allow it official access to the NES development circuit, Rare was incredibly busy – turning out dozens of titles for the console, and licensing them to American publishers. Going from being the toast of the town in the Spectrum market to an anonymous code factory for a weird Japanese toy probably seemed like lunacy to their rivals, but by 1989 Rare was pumping out 17 titles a year rather than the five or six they used to produce as Ultimate. From major TV and movie tie-ins, to original concepts, Rare kept delivering products on time, on budget and racking up impressive sales for their US paymasters. It didn't take long

THE MYSTERY OF MIRE MARE

The ending of *Underwurlde* featured three exits from the castle, each bringing up an ending screen highlighting one of three planned sequels in the Sabreman saga. The first, *Knight Lore*, we all know about – it revolutionised 8-bit gaming. A second sequel, *Pentagram*, followed in 1985, but what of the promised third Sabreman game, the cryptically titled *Mire Mare*?

As well as being trailed at the end of *Undewurlde* and *Pentagram*, it was briefly mentioned in *Sinclair User's* June 1987 issue where they stated that "US Gold knows nothing about it and Ultimate is, as usual, locked in a bunker and not talking to anybody." Other than those tantalising hints, the existence of the game slowly slipped into the realms of myth.

However, a recent interview with a conveniently anonymous ex-Ultimate employee on the Ultimate Appreciation website claimed that the game was not only pretty much completed (before *Gunfright* came out, no less) but that it was held back because Chris and Tim Stamper wanted it to be the big Spectrum finale for the Ultimate brand. But by that point Ultimate was in the hands of US Gold and the Stamper's were – allegedly – so unimpressed with the large corporation's desire to focus on budget re-releases rather than investing in new titles that they pretended *Mire Mare* wasn't even close to being finished, just to keep it out of US Gold's clutches. Everyone moved on and the code for *Mire Mare*, so painfully close to completion, was damned to an eternity in limbo.

Fact or fiction? Well, frankly the story reeks of rampant fan speculation or industry rumour mongering, as nothing in Chris or Tim's history suggests the sort of people who'd let a great game, months of work and a sizeable profit sink into oblivion just for the sake of a petty grudge, but who knows? Maybe one day some completed code will bubble up from out of the online soup and we will know the truth for sure...

» *Nightshade* was fun, but samey.

» Ultimate's first Filmation game: *Knight Lore*.

» Sadly, Pentagram wasn't Sabreman's adventure.

HANDHELD WULF

In 2004 Rare made one of its, well, rare forays into its closely guarded back catalogue by producing a *Sabre Wulf* game for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Naturally, many retro fans drooled in anticipation at the prospect of a portable version of the beloved classic, but Rare had other plans. Rather than an updated jungle maze romp, the resulting title was more of a traditional platformer – with a small smattering of adventure elements – as Sabreman travelled from village to village solving puzzles and going on quests. The meat of the gameplay involved finding and using a variety of friendly creatures (such as Blubba the bear) to get past obstacles. At the end of each level was the item you were after, as well as the angry 'wulf' of the title. He then chased you back through the level, leading to some breathless last-minute escapes. It was actually a charming and innovative game, and received favourable reviews, but sales were elusive. For fans of the franchise, the fact that it clearly wasn't the *Sabre Wulf* of old was a turn off. For everyone else, the *Sabre Wulf* brand just wasn't popular enough to stand alongside the likes of *Pokémon* and other gaming juggernauts. Rare continues to plug away at the handheld market though, with *Banjo Pilot* being another recent update of a past hit for the portable player.

across the board. Rare went on to deliver another N64 hit in the shape of *Diddy Kong Racing*, a standard kart racer that marked the first time the Rare name was used to publish a title. More N64 games followed, but as the format battled in vain to catch up to the PlayStation, inventive and entertaining titles like *Jet Force Gemini*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Banjo-Kazooie* found limited audiences. The *GoldenEye* team's second offering, *Perfect Dark*, wowed those who played it in 2000, but without the money-making Bond license it just wasn't enough to pull the N64 out of its nosedive. It was clear that despite their philosophical common ground, Nintendo's future in the hardware market was shaky, and Rare couldn't afford to keep all its eggs in one basket. Rumours of a buyout flew, as publishers sized up the company's potential. Somebody would buy it, that much was obvious. But who?

In 2002 the mystery was solved. Rare was absorbed into Microsoft Game Studios to produce titles for the Xbox. It was a shaky start for Rare though, with many expecting them to simply churn out the say quality they had for Nintendo. Aside from *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, Rare only produced a remake of its excellent N64 hit *Conker's Bad Fur Day* for the Xbox, due to other titles getting pushed back for Microsoft's Xbox 360. *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Kameo: Elements Of Power* launched on Xbox 360 and showed that Rare had lost none of its technical skills, while *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* and two *Viva Pinåta* games, proved that Rare was still a force to be reckoned with when it came to creativity and innovation in games. Recently however, there's been a significant change in the company, particularly since the Stampers left the company in 2007.

Rare is now heavily involved in developing tech and new software for Microsoft's popular Kinect peripheral, with *Kinect Sports: Season 2* being its most recent release. It's unclear what the future holds for the company, but, unlike so many other once-great Britsoft legends which got lost in the swamp of corporate ownership, Rare still operates much as Ultimate once did. Press is limited, secrecy is paramount...and gameplay is king.

SOFTOGRAPHY

1983

Jetpac (Spectrum, BBC, Vic 20) - Ultimate
Atic Atac (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Pssst (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Tranz Am (Spectrum) – Ultimate

1984

Alien 8 (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Entombed (C64) - Ultimate
Cookie (Spectrum) – Ultimate
Knight Lore (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Lunar Jetman (Spectrum, BBC) – Ultimate
Sabre Wulf (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC) – Ultimate
The Staff of Karnath (C64) – Ultimate
Underwurlde (Spectrum, C64) - Ultimate

1985

Blackwyche (C64) – Ultimate
Nightshade (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) - Ultimate
Pentagram (Spectrum, MSX) - Ultimate

1986

Outlaws (C64) – Ultimate
Cosmic Battlezones (BBC) – Ultimate
Cyberun (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) - Ultimate
Dragonskulle (C64) - Ultimate
Gunfright (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) – Ultimate
Imhotep (C64) - Ultimate

1987

Martianoids (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Bubbler (Spectrum, Amstrad) – Ultimate
Slalom (NES) - Nintendo

1988

The Collected Works (Spectrum) – Ultimate
R.C. Pro-Am (NES) – Nintendo
Wheel of Fortune (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! (NES) - Gametek
Anticipation (NES) - Nintendo

989

Marble Madness (NES) - Milton Bradley
World Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Wrestlemania (NES) – Acclaim
Sesame Street 123 (NES) - Hi Tech
John Elway's Quarterback (NES) – Tradewest
California Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
Taboo (NES) – Tradewest
Wizards & Warriors (NES) – Acclaim
Sesame Street ABC (NES) - Hi Tech
Hollywood Squares (NES) – Gametek
Who Framed Roger Rabbit (NES) – LJN
Jordan Vs Bird: One on One (NES) - Milton Bradley
Cobra Triangle (NES) – Nintendo
Ironsword: Wizards & Warriors II (NES) – Acclaim
Wheel of Fortune: Junior Edition (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! Junior Edition (NES) – Gametek
Silent Service (NES) - Ultra Games

1990

Double Dare (NES) – Gametek
Wheel of Fortune: Family Edition (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition (NES) – Gametek
The Amazing Spider-Man (Game Boy) – LJN
Captain Skyhawk (NES) - Milton Bradley
Pin Bot (NES) – Nintendo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (NES) – Nintendo
Super Off Road (NES) – Tradewest
Wizards & Warriors X: Fortress of Fear (Game Boy) - Acclaim
Narc (NES) - Acclaim
A Nightmare on Elm Street (NES) - LJN
Super Glove Ball (NES) – Mattel
Cabal (NES) - Milton Bradley
Time Lord (NES) - Milton Bradley
Arch Rivals (NES) – Acclaim
WWF Wrestlemania Challenge (NES) – LJN
Solar Jetman (NES) - Tradewest

1991

Digger T. Rock (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Superstars (Game Boy) – LJN
Battletoads (NES, Game Boy) – Tradewest
Beetlejuice (NES) - LJN Super
R.C. Pro-Am (Game Boy) – Nintendo
High Speed (NES) – Tradewest
Sneaky Snakes (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Sesame Street ABC & 123 (NES) - Hi Tech
Pirates! (NES) - Ultra Games

1992

Wizards & Warriors III (NES) – Acclaim
Beetlejuice (Game Boy) – LJN
Indy Heat (NES) – Tradewest
R.C. Pro-Am II (NES) - Tradewest
Championship Pro-Am (Mega Drive) - Tradewest

1993

Battletoads (Mega Drive, Game Gear) – Tradewest
Battletoads Double Dragon (NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy) - Tradewest
Battletoads in Ragnarok's World (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Battletoads in Battlemaniacs (SNES) – Tradewest
X The Ball (Arcade) - Capcom/Brent Walker/Tecmo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (Mega Drive) - SEGA/Tradewest

1994

Monster Max (Game Boy) – Titus
Super Battletoads (Arcade) - Electronic Arts
Donkey Kong Country (SNES) - Nintendo
Killer Instinct (Arcade) - Williams

1995

Donkey Kong Land (Game Boy) – Nintendo
Killer Instinct (SNES, Game Boy) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Country 2 (SNES) – Nintendo

1996

Killer Instinct 2 (Arcade) – Williams
Ken Griffey JR's Winning Run (SNES) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Land 2 (Game Boy) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Country 3 (SNES) – Nintendo
Killer Instinct Gold (N64) – Nintendo

1997

Blast Corps (N64) – Nintendo
GoldenEye (N64) – Nintendo
Diddy Kong Racing (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong Land III (Game Boy) – Nintendo

1998

Banjo-Kazooie (N64) – Nintendo

1999

Conker's Pocket Tales (GBC) – Rare
Jet Force Gemini (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong 64 (N64) – Nintendo
Mickey's Racing Adventure (GBC) – Nintendo

2000

Perfect Dark (N64, GBC) – Rare
Donkey Kong Country (GBC) – Nintendo
Mickey's Speedway USA (N64) – Nintendo
Banjo-Tooie (N64) – Nintendo

2001

Mickey's Speedway USA (GBC) – Nintendo
Conker's Bad Fur Day (N64) – Rare

2002

Star Fox Adventures (GameCube) – Nintendo

2003

Donkey Kong Country (GBA) – Nintendo
Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge (GBA) – THQ
Grabbed by the Ghoulies (Xbox) - MGS

2004

Sabre Wulf (GBA) – THQ
Donkey Kong Country 2 (GBA) – Nintendo
It's Mr/ Pants (GBA) – THQ

2005

Banjo Pilot (GBA) - THQ
Conker: Live & Reloaded (Xbox) - MGS
Donkey Kong Country 3 (GBA) - Nintendo
Kameo: Elements of Power (Xbox 360) - MGS
Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360) - MGS

2006

Viva Piñata (Xbox 360) MGS

2007

Diddy Kong Racing DS (DS) Nintendo
Jetpac Refuelled (Xbox Live Arcade) MGS

2008

Viva Piñata: Trouble In Paradise (Xbox 360) MGS
Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise (Xbox 360) THQ
Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts MGS
Banjo Kazooie (Xbox Live Arcade) MGS

2009

Banjo-Tooie (Xbox Live Arcade) MGS

2010

Perfect Dark (Xbox Live Arcade) MGS
Kinect Sports (Xbox 360) MGS

2011

Kinect Sports: Season Two (Xbox 360) MGS

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- **DEVELOPER:** DENTON DESIGNS
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

THE GREAT ESCAPE

On its release the Spectrum magazines showered The Great Escape with medals – a Crash Smash, a Sinclair User Classic and a Your Sinclair Megagame. High honours indeed, but just how groundbreaking was the game? Martyn Carroll goes under the fence to find out.

When Ocean announced in 1986 that it was releasing a game based on the classic WWII film *The Great Escape* it hardly called for a victory salute (except possibly of the one-fingered variety). After all, Ocean had already dragged to market some appalling licensed products – *Street Hawk* and *Knight Rider* spring to mind – so there was every chance it'd make a mess of the much-loved movie.

Thankfully it wasn't to be, as the game was not a product of Ocean's in-house production line. Instead it was created by Denton Designs, the highly-respected team behind *Shadowfire*, *Frankie Goes to Hollywood* and the Spectrum version of *Spy Hunter*. And it was merely "inspired" by the movie rather than based directly on it, so there was no Charlie Bronson digging tunnels or Steve McQueen jumping over fences on a motorbike. Denton took the basic plot of a gutsy prisoner caged in a German POW camp and built around it one the 8-bit era's – most memorable titles.

Rather than a series of levels, *The Great Escape* features a single stage (the camp) which runs on a strict daily routine. To view the monotony of camp life you don't have to do anything; relinquish the controls and your character will go about his daily business. He'll get out of bed when prompted, then attend morning roll call in front of the German officers, before reporting to the canteen for breakfast. In the afternoon the prisoners

» This is your humble abode, complete with bed, table, and secret tunnel entrance. Very handy that...

THEY SAID:

"THE GREAT ESCAPE IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THE BEST GAMES EVER SEEN ON THE SPECTRUM"

CRASH ISSUE 35

are allowed time in the exercise yard, before attending evening roll call and returning to their huts at the day's end.

In the privacy of your hut you can start to explore your surroundings. There's a stove in the corner, which, when pushed aside reveals a secret tunnel. It's too dark to explore though – you need a torch or something similar. There's nothing else here, so you step outside, taking care not to get caught by the search light that sweeps the camp at night, and sneak into the neighbouring hut. There are no secret tunnels here, but you do find a bottle of poison. Maybe you could use that to deal with the dogs guarding the perimeter fence? For now though you need to get some shut-eye to keep your morale up.

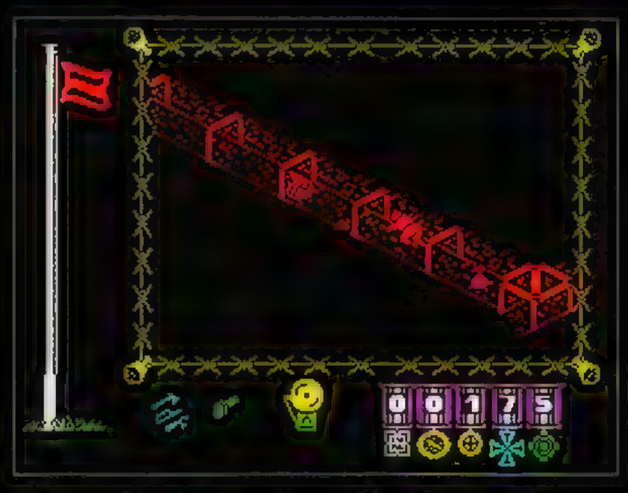
When the next day dawns you begin to suss out your surroundings. After roll call, instead of going straight to the canteen, you try a couple of nearby doors. One is locked (need to find a key...) but the other is open, leading to a small room containing the Red Cross parcel. One of these arrives each morning and it's used by the allies to sneak items into the camp. On day one it contains a rather pointless bag of coins, but on day two a pair of wire cutters are waiting for you. That's more like it. Other items are hidden around the camp, including: a torch, so you can see where you're going in the tunnels; a spade, just the job for unblocking a caved-in tunnel; a useful lock-pick; and best of all, a German uniform which lets you explore restricted areas without arousing suspicion.

With what seems like 101 useful items for escaping a prison camp at your disposal, you'd think you'd be on your way back to dear old Blightly by the end of day two. But naturally it's not that simple. There are the German guards to contend with for a start. They patrol set routes and operate on a basic line-of-sight principle, so it's possible to sneak past them when they turn away. It's certainly not an exact science however, and there's a degree of randomness about being caught, which only serves to increase the tension. There's arguably nothing more heart-stopping in any 8-bit game than trying to pick a lock or cut a hole in a fence (which takes around 10 seconds) while the alarm bell is blaring and the guards are after your blood.

If you do get caught, the items you're carrying will be confiscated and you'll spend a morale-sapping night in solitary. And if your morale hits rock bottom, control is relinquished and your character will shuffle around the camp like a zombie, following the daily routine. Busting out really is the only option and there are several avenues of escape, all of which require careful planning and the correct equipment. A bit of good fortune comes in handy too.

The Great Escape's non-linear gameplay was a breath of fresh air back in 1986, particularly in this genre, and the game's isometric graphical style was just as innovative. For the camp's interiors the game adopts a familiar static approach, much like Ultimate's 3D adventures, but outside the player is treated to a scrolling isometric view. Being able to explore the camp without having to flick between multiple screens really builds a sense of 'being there' in a perfectly realised location. The speed at which the viewpoint scrolls is also impressive, at least on the original Spectrum version (the Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC ports are sluggish in comparison). Presentation is also spot on, with your morale depicted by a flag, which rises and falls, and your score displayed as a row of war medals.

Like the film on which the game is not based (it's "inspired", remember), *The Great Escape* is an 8-bit classic that has stood the test of time. Even if you've managed to escape several times before, getting the right gear together and breaking free is still a thrilling experience. Okay, so if you're playing via emulation then you'll want to crank up the speed a little, but the sense of atmosphere and the spirit of adventure remain tangible to this day.



» The tunnel is not just a sneaky way of travelling around camp, you can also hide goodies in it.

» It's a good job there was no CCTV, otherwise you'd end up in the German version of When Good Prisoners Go Bad.

» When you're caught in the spotlight the guards will be attracted like moths around a light bulb. Make sure you're not spotted!

THE GREAT ESCAPE'S NON-LINEAR GAMEPLAY WAS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR BACK IN 1986, PARTICULARLY IN THIS GENRE AND THE GAME'S ISOMETRIC GRAPHICAL STYLE WAS JUST AS INNOVATIVE

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SHADOWFIRE
SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD/C64 (1985)

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD/C64 (1985)

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
(PICTURED)
SPECTRUM/PC-DOS/ATARI ST (1988)

TURN BACK TIME

Following the success of *The Great Escape*, Denton began work on a follow-up that would utilise the same isometric graphics system but feature a completely new scenario. The result was *Where Time Stood Still*, a sprawling adventure for the Spectrum 128k that took place in a primitive world, pitting a party of plane crash survivors against cannibals, carnivorous animals and various other things that wanted to eat you. This pseudo-sequel is much more linear than *The Great Escape* – you simply have to guide the party from A to B – but there is an emphasis on teamwork and resource management, as you have to switch control between the four characters to solve a series of tricky puzzles. *WTSS* is an epic adventure and a perfect companion piece to *The Great Escape*. It's kind of fitting that the staff at Denton were involved in Imagine's infamous 'mega-games', because with *WTSS* they ultimately created a game that truly deserves that title.

HOLY MOLY: THE STORY OF Monty MOLE

Craig Grannell charts the progress of everyone's favourite videogame mole, from coal thief to superhero, with the help of co-creators Pete Harrap and Tony Crowther, ex-Commodore coder Jason Perkins, and SID chip virtuoso Rob Hubbard

HOLY MOLY: THE STORY OF MONTY MOLE

Ian Stewart, managing director at Gremlin Graphics, was once into double letters for initials, remembers Tony Crowther: "There had been *Potty Pigeon* in 1984, and then he came up with the name Monty Mole and asked me to write a game using the character." At the time, Tony was fixated on creating scrolling games on the C64, such as *Son Of Blagger*, and he thought he could do something better with the knowledge he'd since gained.

Through experimentation, Tony got a larger and faster scrolling platform game working: "Getting the tech right was a big challenge, but I had a crude sprite running around the map, and integrated a randomly generated maze, which at the time I was fascinated with." Once the *Monty Mole* name was decided, the game was moulded to suit. Tony recalls that with the game being designed on a big map, anything that didn't fit was dispensed with, and he aimed to include as much variety as he could. "I did have issues with the maximum number of sprites, with only eight allowed on the same line," he adds. "So the design worked around the number of available sprites, and also motion: I wanted to make as many moving parts as possible, with conveyer belts and crushers."

In a curious case of parallel development, Tony's game wasn't the only one in the works. Pete Harrap was given the same loose brief, but his target platform was the ZX Spectrum. With the Speccy lacking the hardware tricks necessary for full-screen scrolling, Pete unsurprisingly came up with something very different, inspired by *Manic Miner*. "That was the type of game I enjoyed back then – a mix of humour, simplicity and 'how do I get up there before I run out of time?' puzzles," he says.

DOWN THE PIT

In Pete's hands, Monty's Spectrum debut also took on a political bent. Pete placed Monty in a coal mine, making a daring raid to grab enough fuel to see himself through a long, cold winter. This was played out against a backdrop of

IN THE KNOW

PUBLISHER: Gremlin Graphics
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics/ Core Design (*Impossamole*)
PLATFORM: Various
RELEASED: 1984–1990
GENRE: Platform
EXPECT TO PAY: £1+ per game

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THING ON A SPRING
1985 | C64, Amstrad

JACK THE NIPPER (pictured)
1986 | Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, MSX

real-world industrial action in the UK, with coal miners striking, urged on by National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill, who makes a brief appearance in the game, in caricature form. These elements rewarded Pete's game with a television appearance and led to promises by Gremlin to make a donation to a miners' charity.

"The miners' strike angle was because my dad was a coal-face worker, annoyed that he never got a vote on the strike," explains Pete. "Miners used to be very democratic, and it wasn't fair for my dad to be made to strike to satisfy the ambitions of Scargill, no matter how right he was about mine closures. He treated the miners as though they were stupid and couldn't decide for themselves."

This being the Eighties, Pete didn't create a typical mine for Monty to explore. Although it included a trip on a mine cart, dangerous falling debris and, of course, coal, it was also populated by all manner of surreal and dangerous foes, including demons and leaping sharks. "The visuals were fun, based on items that could be used in a mine, scare you, or make you laugh," he says. "My favourite was the dripping candle, although you wouldn't get a naked flame in a real mine!" It was also decided that the Spectrum version should be a flick-screen adventure rather than aping *Manic Miner*'s single-screen approach, to "allow the player more choice on where to go next". Having started with what later became the game's second screen, a mine entrance, Pete worked up maps and figured out how they linked together, which determined the types of platforms that were required. The game was very rapidly put together, taking about three months in all.

» *Monty On the Run* on the Spectrum lacks Rob Hubbard's stunning C64 tune, but is still great fun.

» Helpful tip: don't fall down a mountain and get eaten by a yeti!

VICIOUS STREAK

Although Tony and Pete mostly worked in isolation – Tony recalls that his game was pretty much done by the time the Spectrum version was started, but Pete says the first he knew about the C64 version was when his game was almost finished – there was still time before shipping to swap a few ideas.

According to Pete, a couple of changes were demanded by Ian, who considered the Spectrum version to be "lacking a little oomph". Pete duly pilfered Tony's coal-crushers and added them to his game, then made them more vicious: "I was the one who made their movement in the Spectrum version random… guilty!"

Since Pete had decided on the game's hero stealing coal, that component was added to Tony's game. Additionally, Ian felt both games needed some kind of opening screen, and so Pete devised a scene where Monty sneaks up to a miner's house and grabs his coal bucket, before making a break for the mine, pursued by an angry miner and dodging massive acorns dropped by a crazed squirrel. A variant was added to the C64 version, but Pete took the added step of making all the coal in the Spectrum game invisible if you didn't first collect the bucket. "I guess I'm a bit cruel," he laughs. "But I felt it was obvious. How can you collect coal without a bucket?"

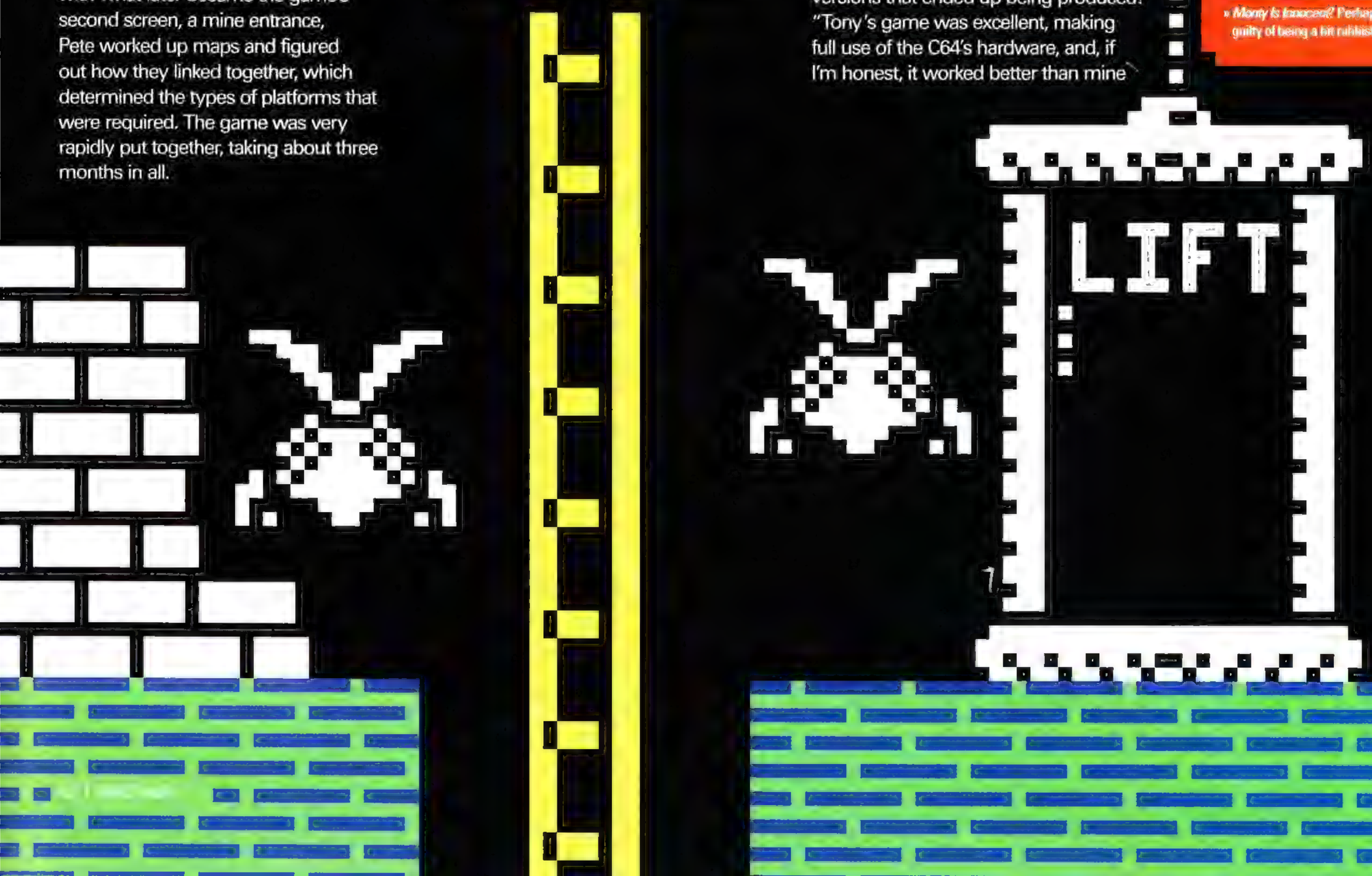
With *Wanted: Monty Mole* complete, Pete was satisfied, and while he'd have liked more screens and sprites – he explains that he never found a suitable spot for a digital version of his head – no grand plans were cut. "In hindsight, I'd give you a bit of warning on the crushers and clues about what might kill you – I was too cruel sometimes," he muses. "But I remember standing in WHSmith, looking at my hard work on a shelf, when a nine-year-old walked up and said, 'I want that one,' which was a proud moment." And on the varying versions that ended up being produced? "Tony's game was excellent, making full use of the C64's hardware, and, if I'm honest, it worked better than mine

MONTY IS INNOCENT

THE SECOND GAME in the *Monty Mole* series might have the furry felon adorning the cover art and title screen, but he was barely in the game itself. Instead, the hero of the hour was Sam Stoat, determined to free his chum from the bowels of Scudmore Prison. Designed by Chris Kerry, the title dispenses with *Wanted: Monty Mole*'s platforms. Instead, action is presented as a complex isometric 3D maze. In theory, the aim is to grab a key from the governor's office, to open one of the cell doors in another part of the complex; do this several times and you'll finally locate Monty. In reality, much of the game involves avoiding myriad beasties that kill Sam with the slightest touch, and getting hugely frustrated with the insane difficulty of springing Monty.

Reviews were mixed, and Pete notes that he had no involvement in its creation: "I only saw it after completion and didn't like it at all. To me, Monty is always a platformer." Gamers agreed; poor sales were largely what led to Pete being asked to work on a proper sequel to his original hit, the series high point that was *Monty On The Run*.

» *Monty Is Innocent*? Perhaps. But the game's guilty of being a bit rubbish.



would have if directly ported. But mine was best. I'm biased!"

GOING IT ALONE

With a second game starring Monty having failed to trouble the charts (see *'Monty Is Innocent'*), Pete was asked to design a sequel more in keeping with his original. "Since he'd escaped prison, Monty was on the run," he says of the basic concept and name of the follow-up, *Monty On The Run*. But while Pete was keen to retain the style of *Wanted*, he was adamant that it shouldn't just be the same game with more screens. "I'd been disappointed with *Jet Set Willy* on that score," he says. "It lost a lot of detail when compared to *Manic Miner*, presumably to make the extra screens fit. I thought *Manic Miner* was the better game – more creative and fun."

With a mantra that adding screens at the cost of creativity was the wrong direction, Pete let his imagination drive *Monty On The Run*'s development. The map, while still broadly linear, offered more scope for exploration. New features were added, including teleporters, a somersaulting Monty, and lifts – one of which abruptly crashes, crushing the hero. Additionally, although most of the game remained a traditional platformer, two sections were very different: one found Monty piloting a jetpack; the other had him driving a C5. "The somersault was because I liked *Impossible Mission* on the C64 and wondered how it would look if I borrowed that for *Monty*," admits Pete. But other new map-oriented features were to force gamers to explore: "The 'porters are there because I'm a Trekkie, but I also wanted to create short cuts around the map, and areas you could only get into one way and then have to escape from. As for the broken lift, the first one was to discourage you from taking a perfectly good short cut later on. Did I mention I was cruel?"

Pete remembers when Ian bought a C5, explaining its presence: "I thought: 'Nice, a washing machine with wheels – I can use that!' I wanted to make it do wheelies, but couldn't fit the animations in, so I was stuck with it jumping." The jetpack, meanwhile, was a tribute to Ultimate. "Plus I thought strapping a jetpack to a mole would give you a fun new control method to get used to right in the middle of the game."

Monty On The Run sometimes frustrated – there were abrupt deaths and a pre-game 'Freedom Kit' that made areas impassable if you'd selected the wrong item. "I loved throwing spanners back then," chuckles Pete, noting that kit items were specifically chosen to appear useful. But the game was nonetheless far more playable and balanced than *Wanted*. "It's my favourite, because I feel I got almost everything right," affirms Pete. "It played exactly how I wanted, with just the right amount of humour."

"The broken lift discouraged you from taking a short cut later on. Did I mention I was cruel?"

CONVERSION CAPERS

This time, instead of a wildly different C64 version, it largely matched the Spectrum's, which Pete recalls was down to fan demands and sales figures: "The C64 game didn't do as well as the Spectrum release, so Ian decided to make the games more similar."

Also, Tony had left Gremlin, leaving Pete entirely in control of the game's direction, which was defined by the Spectrum's capabilities. Even so, the games didn't turn out identical, due to the C64's masterful Rob Hubbard soundtrack (see 'Number-one score') and some graphical additions, which Pete says were

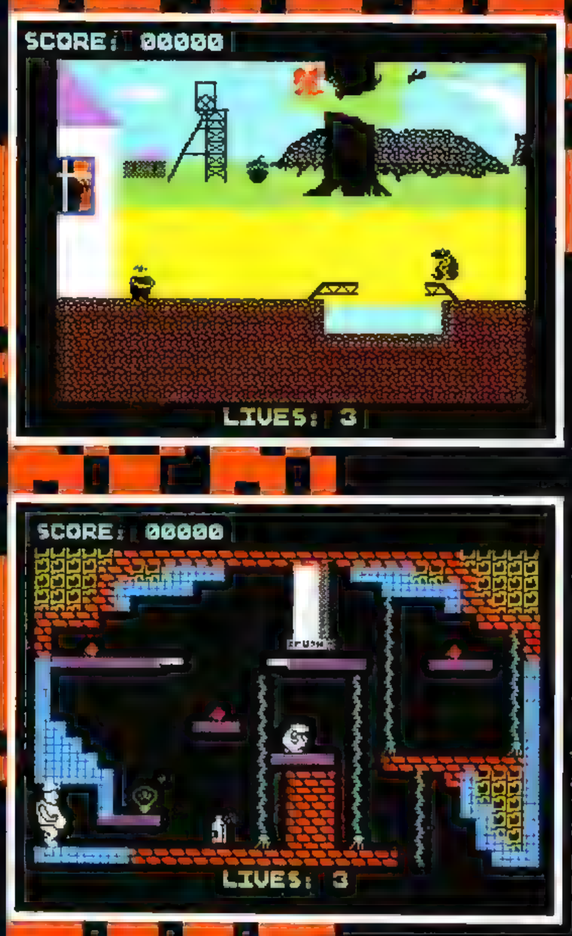
MOLEY CHRISTMAS

THE LAST CLASSIC *Monty Mole* game appeared as a Christmas gift for readers of *Your Sinclair*. Issue 25's covermount was the exclusive *Moley Christmas*, boasting six single-screen locations into which the essence of *Monty On The Run* had been distilled. The game had an ever-decreasing energy meter, so demanded fast reactions and quick thinking to solve puzzles and progress through the Gremlin Graphics HQ, mastering and duplication plants, the M1, and the offices of *Your Sinclair*. The final location finds Monty delivering the mag to a newsagent while braving traffic on a busy road – a cute riff on *Frogger*.

"We did the game as a favour to Ian and kept it quite simple, because it was to be given away on a mag," recalls Pete. "But we certainly still wanted to give value to the *Monty Mole* concept. The limited amount of time we had to develop the game was what led to more having to be done per screen. But that also meant we got more time to spend tweaking each location, even though the total development time was much less than for previous *Monty Mole* titles."

» Monty attempts to thumb a lift on the M1 in *Moley Christmas*

» Why Monty can't settle on this sunny island at the start of *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*, we'll never know.



» Shark in the mine! Health and safety's going to have a field day.

"absolutely what I'd have chosen myself" and made the conversion "the better of the two *On The Runs*."

The conversion was done by Micro Projects Limited, set up by Jason Perkins (now director of Curve Studios), Tony Clarke and Mark Rogers. Jason remembers how Pete gave the team level designs and artwork, including printouts of Spectrum sprites, which were meticulously re-created on the C64, pixel by pixel. Data dumps were provided for background tile sets, but these needed amending, as Jason explains: "One advantage the C64 had over the Speccy was its 40-character display, compared to 32 on the Sinclair machine. This meant a straight port would have left blank areas at the side of the screen." The solution was mostly to centre the 32-character screens of the Spectrum version and fill the remaining space with additional artwork. "We also made a number of original objects – plant pots, wine bottles, traffic cones – that we could place anywhere on the screen to help disguise areas where the duplication of rows looked a bit obvious," he adds.

This approach might seem a bit 'bare minimum', but Jason remembers that Gremlin had given Micro Projects only four weeks to complete the conversion. Also, the decision to go with high-res Spectrum-style graphics came after experimentation.

"We tried using the C64's twin-pixel multicoloured mode, but it was difficult to get anything looking good, and the deadline meant redoing all of the art wasn't really an option," says Jason. Although the team had the C64's extra memory, it lacked time, and so ambitious plans to code a full-scrolling C5 section had to be abandoned. "But, to be honest, the Spectrum game was in such good shape when we got involved that it was a fairly straightforward development to get it up and running on the Commodore," considers Jason. "And we were very happy with the finished game, which was reflected in the reviews. We knew it was good."

MINI MOLE

Jason also worked on another *On The Run*, this time for the C16. "That could have been a great home computer, but Commodore released it without hardware sprites. And with the hardware flopping in the US, the company dumped it in Europe, meaning there were loads of units around," grumbles Jason, who tells us that Commodore sent him, out of the blue, a free machine and disk drive, hoping he'd develop games for it. Ten C16 titles were sold to Gremlin by Micro Projects, but the company closed by the time the *On The Run* order arrived, and so Jason teamed with Terry Lloyd, who he remembers was "a big fan of the *Monty Mole* series and a great graphics artist and level designer".

With no hardware sprites and only 16K of RAM available, the game had to be stripped back, without losing its essence. "We established that we could only have four moving sprites on the screen at once, including Monty, so went to work filleting the existing levels and reducing the overall content," explains Jason. "We felt as long as we kept the main control system for Monty, maintained the frantic dodging of moving objects and kept the crushers, the conversion would be possible."

The team used the same trick as with the C64 version, stretching the edges of the map to fill the 40-character screen, although major redesigns perhaps made that less necessary; elsewhere, other than Monty, it was determined that all moving objects would only travel horizontally or vertically. "It was a simple process to pre-pixel-scroll the moving characters at the start of each screen," says Jason.

Although simpler than the other 8-bit versions, the C16 conversion was lauded by the press, with *Commodore User* awarding it a

NUMBER-ONE SCORE

THE C64 VERSION of *Monty On The Run* was an impressive, great-looking conversion, but it was Rob Hubbard's soundtrack – often considered the C64's best – that really set it apart from other games of the day. "It was based on a tape Gremlin sent me [of *Devil's Galop*] and they asked me to do something similar, so I expanded it as much as I could and added some additional parts," recalls Rob. "The solo in the middle was the result of a pitch-bend routine I'd added to the player, and everything was 6502 assembler and hard coded in '.byte' statements. I basically coded a guitar-type solo I worked out on a piano until it approximated what I heard in my head, as it were! There was also a third section at the end, which was a frenetic build-up to the climax, before the music looped. Add in the sound effects and the whole thing was less than 5KB!"

Screen Star and declaring it the "definitive C16 platform game". Jason remains happy with the conversion, which was completed on time, in just a few weeks. More importantly, it captured the key gameplay elements of the *Monty Mole* series: "The C16 community was happy as, for once, a publisher was taking the machine seriously and developing a well-respected franchise for it, rather than releasing a pile of old crap to make a quick buck."

at least, it rated highly, but *Zzap!64* slammed the C64 conversion, arguing that "even the most ardent of *Monty* fans is likely to be disappointed".

Pete isn't quick to defend his creation. "We overworked it," he admits. "We tried to do a lot more with *Auf*, and quite a lot of it worked, but there were not enough genuinely new ideas and they felt a bit forced." He recalls enjoying creating the map – "We got a lot more screens in, with a nice representation of real European locations" – and liked the sticky platforms that Monty could walk on, upside down. But the drunk mode? "Yeah, that was contrived… The entire game was a bit like how *Jet Set Willy* felt to me – it lost a bit of fun and originality in trying to add too much."

Still, Pete at least gave Monty some breakdancing lessons. "That was due to Ben [Daglish] doing such a popping tune. I looked at the graphics we'd done and thought they could be strung together into a dance. When I tried that, I couldn't stop laughing, so they stayed." He says game development can be like that, and you should never be afraid to deviate from the plan and try something for the fun of it. "One reason I stopped coding ten years ago was the restrictions placed on us by 'producers', one being 'thou shalt not deviate from the schedule'." Should *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* have perhaps had more deviations? "Well, maybe more time. It's not a game too far, but a game too early," considers Pete. "It needed longer before we created it, for it to be more original. But then I also stand by the principle that appears as true for games as films: never watch the third of a trilogy, because all the best stuff was used in the first two!"

"Where else can you do somersaults as a fat, one-eyed mole with a coal fixation?"

GOODBYE, MONTY

Back on the Spectrum, the final commercially released *Monty Mole* title Pete worked on was *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*, presumably intended, given its title, to be the character's swan song. The game took the basic blueprint from *Monty On The Run*, but tasked Monty with exploring Europe, his aim being to earn enough cash to buy an island. This was achieved by picking up money carelessly left lying about, along with pilfering objects and selling them on. The opaque puzzles combined with irritating new features – an annoying in-game arcade sequence where you attack a biplane with your craft's propellers; control-reversing wine pick-ups; icy areas where Monty randomly slides about – resulted in a game that lost the purity of its predecessor. On the Spectrum,

IMOLE

Bar an appearance on a covermount (see *'Moley Christmas'*) and a Core-designed outing so at odds with other *Monty Mole* games that it barely qualifies as an entry in the series (*'Impossamole'*), our bug-chomping chum has been silent for two decades, but Pete plans to resurrect the character. "I have two *Monty* games in my head. One is a full-on original, with all-new content. The other is a tribute to my favourite – *On The Run* – with tweaks to omit things that now irritate me," he reveals. Some changes are to be minor – ditching the cloud lift in the second screen, for example – but others should prove very interesting: "There will be achievements and different ways of playing the same map, including training maps and a multiplayer mode that might include *Thing On A Spring*-style slippers."

The game is slated for a 2012 release on iOS (see **harrap.net** for progress reports), and Pete's experimenting with control methods to ensure that Apple's buttonless device doesn't lead to myriad dead moles: "Imagine touching Monty and sketching where he goes, tapping to make him jump. Another method involves gesture-based swipes and flicks. Both are intended to be intuitive." And, as you might expect, this is a labour of love for the veteran games designer: "I'm doing it because I enjoy it. It won't cost much, and hopefully it'll bring a smile to players, old and new. My grandson keeps asking when it'll be ready, and he's only four!"

To close, we ask why Pete thinks Monty's so fondly remembered, especially considering how frustrating some of the screens in his games are. "I hope it's because they were fun to play," he begins, "but, for me, it's because where else can you do somersaults as a fat, one-eyed mole with a coal fixation? Now, where's me jetpack?"

» *Monty On The Run* was one of the best games in the series, and remains an entertaining platformer.

» And we always thought the Eiffel Tower was taller than a dozen upright moles…

IMPOSSAMOLE

GREMLIN'S FINAL CRACK at a *Monty Mole* game arrived in 1990. Created by Core Design, *Impossamole* had the odd nod to earlier games in the series – crushers, a mine cart in the first level – but the gameplay was far closer in feel to Core's own *Rick Dangerous*. Also, Monty had the ability to kick his foes' faces off and was, at times, armed to the teeth. Monty with a bazooka is a far cry from an insectivore scrabbling around for a bit of coal to keep warm.

The result was a title that divided opinion, between those who enjoyed the lush graphics and challenge and those who didn't care for its sluggishness, excessive difficulty and lack of innovation. Pete wasn't impressed by what he saw: "I never played it and didn't like the idea." Still, he admits that "there might be a cape power-up in the iOS *Monty On The Run* multiplayer maps".

» Monty forlornly looks on in *Impossamole*, the mine cart reminding him of better times.

BATTY

THE BEST FREEBIE EVER?

- **PUBLISHER** HIT-PAK
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

HISTORY

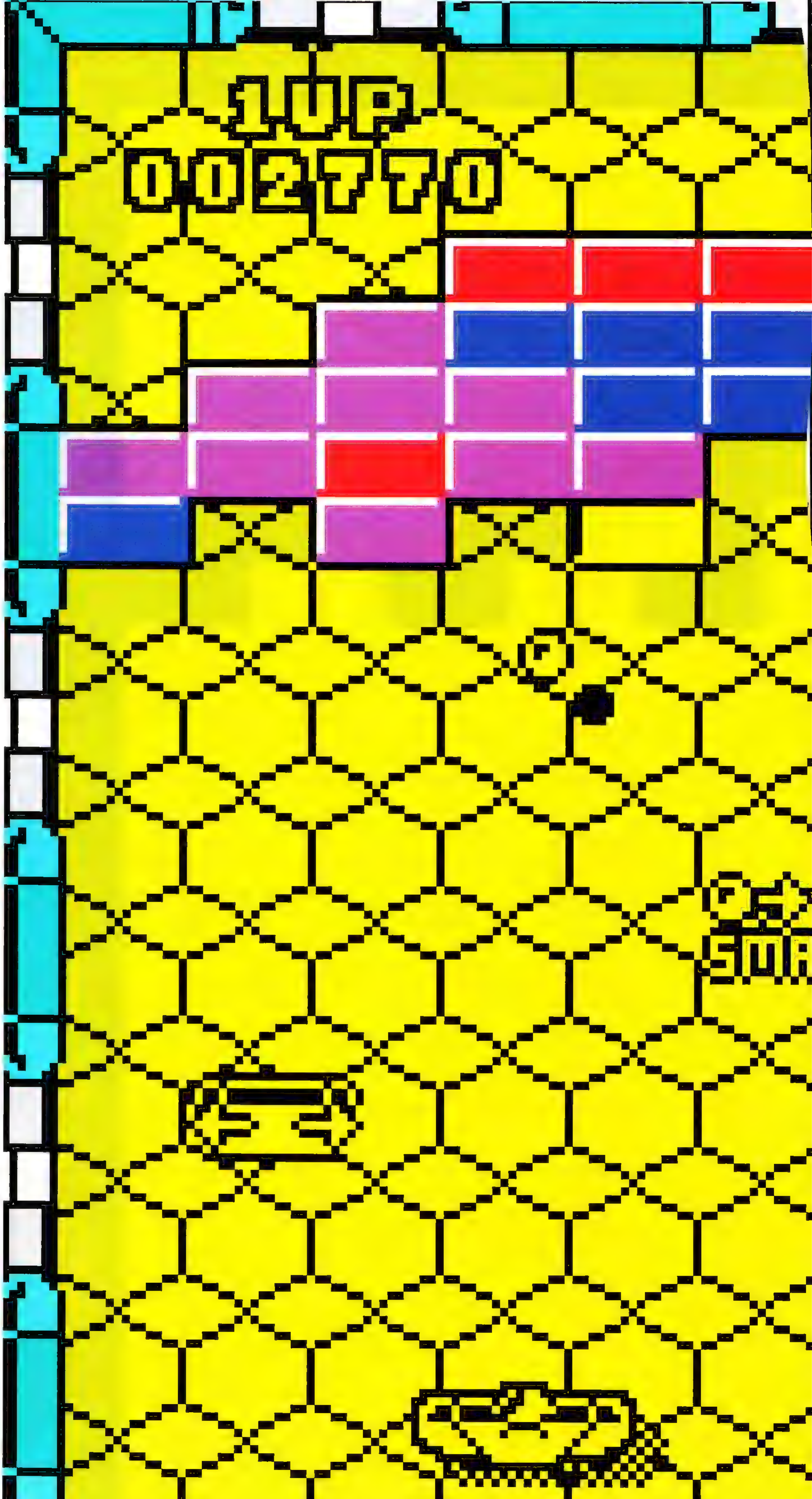
Imagine picking up the latest console magazine and finding the latest AAA hit attached to it. Believe it or not, that's exactly what happened one evening in 1987 when I wandered down to my local newsagents with my best mate, Paul, and picked up the latest issue of Your Sinclair. The game in question was called *Batty*, and to Paul and myself it appeared to be little more than a bog-standard clone of Imagine's recently released *Arkanoid* – how wrong we were…

While *Batty* looked and played similarly to the classic coin-op hit, it boasted plenty of smart extras that elevated it above Imagine's full-priced effort. The actual visuals were big bold and chunky and very colourful. The game's many aliens actually retaliated by dropping bombs on you and there were plenty of cool power-ups that ranged from extending the size of your bat, to a handy set of jets that would conveniently boost you to the next, tougher level.

For all its solid level design, bold visuals and gripping gameplay, there was one element of *Batty* that lifted it above all other similar games and made it untouchable – the amazing simultaneous two-player mode

Rather than take turns, each player simply guarded one half of the screen and shared a set number of lives between them. Whilst this cleverly stopped you from getting your bats mixed up (although it limited the amount of power-ups you could collect) it didn't help the poor sod who was unfortunate enough to let *Batty*'s ball slip past his defences, as he normally got a mouthful of abuse from his team-mate.

Batty didn't stay exclusive for very long as it eventually appeared on a compilation, and at a budget price. While it lasted though, lucky Spectrum owners were treated to something very special indeed. And to think Elite turned down the opportunity to publish it…



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SPECTRUM | 47

THE MAKING OF...
TURBO ESPRIT

Before Grand Theft Auto III there was Driver, and before that there was Turbo Esprit, the 8-bit classic that skidded onto Sinclair's Spectrum more than 26 years ago. Martyn Carroll talks to Durell's Robert White and Mike Richardson about the game that has spawned many a monster hit.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** DURELL SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** DRIVING/STRATEGY
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

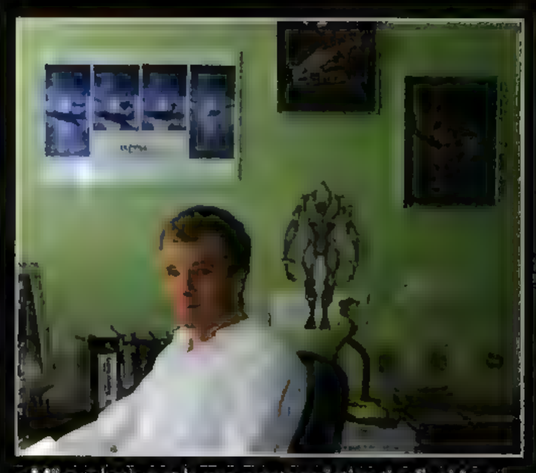
***Turbo Esprit* is not a typical driving game. There's no clock, track or chequered flag. If that sounds plain wrong then maybe you were expecting to read about *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, Gremlin's similar-sounding Amiga racer that was ported to the Spectrum and other 8-bits.** The games may share a Lotus license but they couldn't be more different. Unlike the Gremlin game, *Turbo Esprit* was not born from the almost impossible desire to replicate seat-of-your-pants racing on the Spectrum. If anything, Durell founder Robert White was aiming even higher.

"Fundamentally I wanted to create a game where you could drive through a city in real time," he says, before revealing that the initial inspiration for the game was somewhat, erm, sterile. "Prior to starting Durell I worked for the Oxford Regional Health Authority where we did hospital design. We used an integrated model in which you inputted design data and it would generate 3D maps of hospital wards. The idea was that you mapped the data once and then you could visualise it in different ways, and this was where the basic idea for *Turbo Esprit* came from."

TAKING THE WHEEL

With the concept in place, Robert handed control to in-house programmer Mike Richardson. Mike joined Durell in 1984 when he was 26-years-old and was responsible for several of the company's early hits, including *Harrier Attack* for the CPC and *Scuba Dive*

» Mike (left) looks on as Robert demos software on his trusty Oric-1 that he bought when he first founded Durell.



» Mike relaxing at home, contemplating the final few weeks of work on *Harrier Attack II*.

for the Spectrum. "I had a huge amount of confidence in Mike," reveals Robert. "He was such a good programmer that I could outline an idea to him and he would take it from there. He added all the fantastic little bits and pieces like people walking down the street, pedestrian crossings, traffic lights and things like that. As with everything he did it turned out brilliantly."

Robert is full of praise for Mike's obvious talent but the man himself is surprisingly self-effacing. His softly spoken recollections of *Turbo Esprit*'s development suggest an almost workmanlike approach in which the game slowly but surely came together. "*Turbo Esprit* was the game I spent the longest on," he says. "It took about ten months in total to complete, but I was never under any pressure to rush to finish the game. I felt that Robert trusted me to do a good job in reasonable time and I guess there wasn't a huge marketing department gearing up for a particular date like there often is these days."

Mike spent the first few months developing the 3D system that would give Speccy owners the impression of being behind the wheel of a turbo-charged sports car. He'd already created one 3D-style game – the helicopter sim *Combat Lynx* – but having to build a large inhabited city, with roads running north, south, east and west, was an entirely different proposition. "It was a bit of a feat," he says. "All of the 3D was done from a lookup table, so there was no calculation of points in 3D at all. Any point on a building always occurred at a certain line in the lookup table rather than by calculation. Obviously if you tried to calculate 3D on a Spectrum you'd be there all day."

> "FUNDAMENTALLY I WANTED TO CREATE A GAME WHERE YOU COULD DRIVE THROUGH A CITY IN REAL TIME" ROBERT WHITE

Mike succeeded in getting the game running at a decent pace, but one particularly neat feature had to be sacrificed for speed's sake. "The display original had a rear-view mirror which I had to scrap. It wasn't difficult to do but it meant rendering the scene twice which would have slowed everything down too much." The keen-eyed amongst you may like to note that the rear-view mirror can be seen in the screenshots used on the game's original packaging and advertising.

JUST SAY NO

With the technical groundwork completed Mike began to piece the gameplay together. The first consideration was the back-story and this was shaped by an all-powerful influence – the boss's wife. "She was against violence in games so we had to be careful with blood and stuff," he smiles. "There

» As with many Durrel games, the Spectrum version was superb, and much better than its 8-bit peers.

» Squint at the screenshots on this ad and you'll see the rear-view mirror that had to be scrapped during development

BOX OF TRICKS

To help speed up the development process, Mike shunned the Spectrum's feeble keyboard and tape-save system in favour of a more practical alternative. "I bought an Epson CP/M machine which had two 5.25in floppy drives and 256Kb of RAM – 64Kb was used for the operating system and the rest formed a handy RAM drive. I upgraded the memory to 1Mb by plugging in different RAM chips, modified the motherboard and slightly re-programming the OS. Then I soldered together a cable to connect the Epson printer port to an add-on parallel interface on the Spectrum. I could work on the Epson, using a proper keyboard and the RAM drive for compilation, then download the compiled code to the Spectrum in seconds. Inside the case it all looked a bit Heath Robinson but it worked amazingly well."

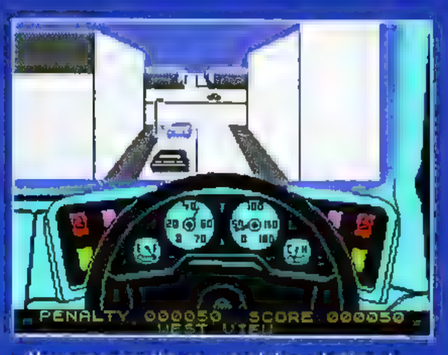
THE MAKING OF...
TURBO ESPRIT

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

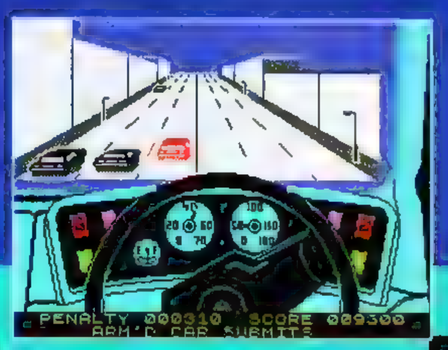
HARRIER ATTACK
SYSTEMS: ORIC-1, SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1983

SABOTEUR
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, C16, PLUS4
YEAR: 1986

THANATOS
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1986



» You can stop the no-good drug dealers by either shooting their vehicle or ramming them into submission.



» The mission is complete when the armoured car submits, but the fight against drugs never ends. There are more cities to cleanse, more suppliers to stop.

```
   * TURBO ESPRIT MENU *

1     ALTER SKILL (1)
2     ALTER PLAYING KEYS
3     VIEW SCORE TABLE
4     VIEW PENALTY TABLE
5     SAVE SCORE TABLES
6     LOAD SCORE TABLES
7     PRACTICE
8     PLAY

     ENTER 1 TO 8
```

» The Spectrum version features a sparse menu system. "I'm not interested in fancy front-ends," says Mike.

was some discussion in the office as to what the game could be about and we arrived at drug dealing and trying to put a lid on it, as it where. You were a good guy, which went along with the non-violent thing. There was no blood – it wasn't ugly in that respect."

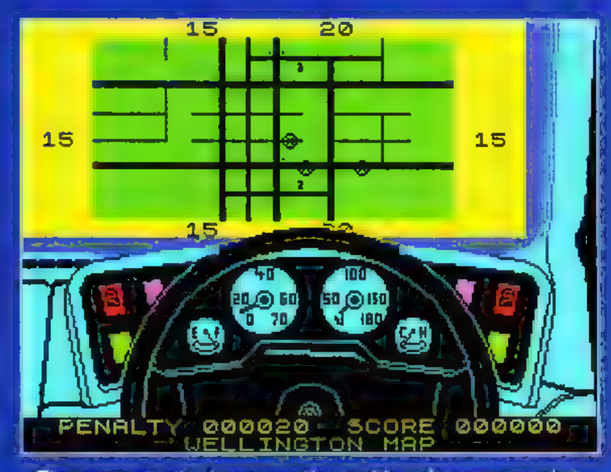
The 007 comparisons are obvious, as you play a secret agent driving a Lotus

» The Big 4 compilation marked the first appearance of *Turbo Esprit* on the C64. Celebrations were understandably muted

Esprit, complete with onboard machine guns, but there's much more to the game than speeding around one of the four cities shooting smugglers. Robert refers to each city as a chessboard and this is a fitting analogy as you must watch the map and plan your strategy while the players make their move. Mike provides a programmer's commentary: "The idea is to park up around the corner from where the drugs exchange will occur. The is usually near the city centre – you can find out the precise position by observing the behaviour of the four smugglers' cars as they will circle the drop-point waiting for the armoured drug car to arrive. If you're parked too close to the drop-point the exchange doesn't take place, so you must watch the map, wait for the exchange to happen, see which way the cars are heading for a second and then give chase."

To score maximum points you must stop each of the four smugglers from escaping with the drugs and then apprehend the armoured car before it too leaves the city. It's significant that the gameplay does not pause when you view the city map, as this allows the action to play out in real time. This is particularly effective when you're closing in on a target, as you must keep glancing at the map as you tear through the city. Taking your eyes off the road even for a split second could be deadly, with you running red lights, slamming into oncoming traffic or mowing down hapless pedestrians attempting to cross the road.

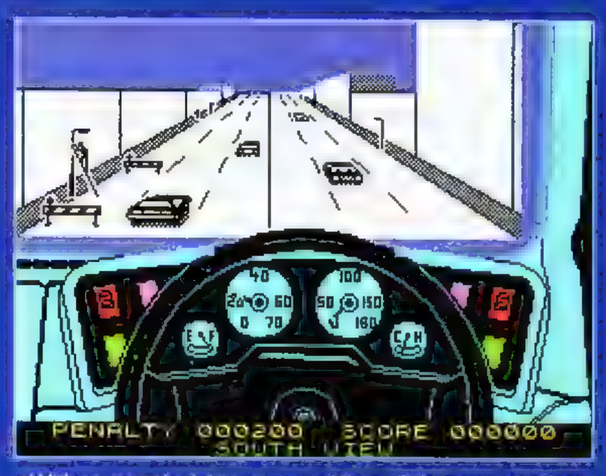
The game does not turn a blind eye to dangerous driving – there's a penalty meter that clocks each of your traffic offences. Cause enough mayhem and you're invited



» The map not only shows you the position of enemy cars but also highlights petrol stations.

to enter your name in the hall of shame, and it goes without saying that this was an attractive proposition to many gamers; rounding up bad guys was fun but killing innocents was fantastic! Mike reveals that this was no accident: "I planned it because that's the sort of stuff I personally liked to do best. To actually attempt the mission takes effort and brain power, and some people don't like doing that, so I added a few extra things to see and do." We assume that the boss's wife never found out about this gruesome little sideshow.

Surprisingly, one of the last things to be added was the Lotus branding. Originally you were driving a generic set of wheels, but late on in the development one of Durell's advertisers had the bright idea of approaching Lotus. "The Lotus link came right at the end," explains Robert. "We had an advertising agency based in Norwich, not far from the Lotus factory. We asked for permission to use its name and Lotus agreed, as it was free advertising for its



» With so many bad drivers around those little men up ladders never stood a chance.

flagship model. It wasn't a money deal or anything like that – things were a lot more innocent back then."

Rather than slap the Lotus brand on and be done with it, Mike spent time updating the game graphics to fit. "We went and visited Lotus," he recalls. "It wasn't of any technical use but we did come back with some pictures of Lotus cars. The car on the outside was certainly modelled on an Esprit, or as much as I could do with a few pixels. The dashboard in the game was hardly a perfect replica," he laughs, as modest as ever. Closer inspection reveals that the in-game dashboard is spookily similar to an Eighties model Esprit, with all the gauges in the right places and the speedometer registering the correct top speed of the real car. The devil's in the detail, as they say.

PAVING THE WAY

Thanks to its expansive city setting, genre-mashing gameplay and open structure, *Turbo Esprit* is widely acknowledged as a forerunner to games like *Driver* and *Grand Theft Auto*. It's ironic then that its far-reaching influence is completely lost on Mike who is no longer an avid gamer. "I haven't played a game properly since *Tomb Raider* on the PSone about 10 years ago," he admits to us. "I just don't find myself with any spare time these days."

Robert, on the other hand, is more aware of the game's impact, even though Durell pulled out of the games market 20 years ago (the company now develops database software). He has no regrets about not capitalising on *Turbo Esprit* however, merely pointing out that the industry has always gorged on itself to survive. "With *Turbo Esprit* I think we were the first to come up with the idea of mapping a city and then driving through it. But then our first game, *Harrier Attack*, was just a side-on shooter like *Scramble*. We sold around 250,000 copies of *Harrier Attack* and it generated most of the development money for the next three years, so games like *Turbo Esprit* were all thanks to *Harrier Attack*, which was basically a rip-off of someone else's idea. I guess that's the way it works."

Turbo Esprit didn't come close to matching the success of *Harrier Attack* – Robert estimates that it sold a respectable 50,000 copies, although the total would be higher if you included the game's inclusion on compilations and its later re-release on Elite Software's budget label. Debuting in Spring 1986, the original Spectrum release was the best selling version, thanks to excellent reviews from gaming mags (it earned a Your Sinclair Megagame, a Sinclair User Classic and was just two per cent shy of a coveted Crash Smash). A passable Amstrad CPC port followed in the Summer, while the C64 version spluttered onto the scene at Christmas as part of the *Durell Big 4* compilation alongside *Saboteur*, *Combat Lynx* and *Critical Mass*. It's hardly surprisingly that the C64 port was not granted a standalone release as it's a real car crash of a game.

We wrapped things up by asking Mike if the Spectrum hardware simply lent itself better to 3D-style games like *Turbo Esprit*, and for the first time in our company he sings his own praises. "I'd like to think it was better on the Spectrum because of my expertise, if that's okay with you."

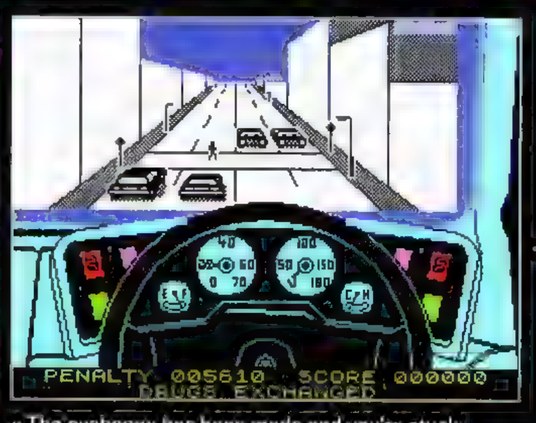
That's perfectly okay with us Mike.

> "TO ACTUALLY ATTEMPT THE MISSION TAKES EFFORT AND BRAIN POWER, AND SOME PEOPLE DON'T LIKE DOING THAT, SO I ADDED A FEW EXTRA THINGS TO SEE AND DO" MIKE RICHARDSON

TURBO ESPRIT 2?

There was no talk of a *Turbo Esprit* sequel in the Eighties – Mike preferred to work on original projects like *Thanatos* and *Sigma Seven* – but there's a chance we may yet see some kind of follow-up. Mike developed a PC sequel to *Harrier Attack*, working under the Durell Games banner. A quick visit to the website (www.durellgames.com) reveals lots of information about *Harrier Attack II*, and there's a poll where visitors can vote for which old Durell game Mike should update next. At present *Turbo Esprit* is easily topping the poll with almost twice as many votes as the game in second place, *Scuba Dive*, so if the voting continues in this way a sequel could very well be on the cards. Sadly, *Harrier Attack II* wasn't a success, so we might not ever see a sequel.

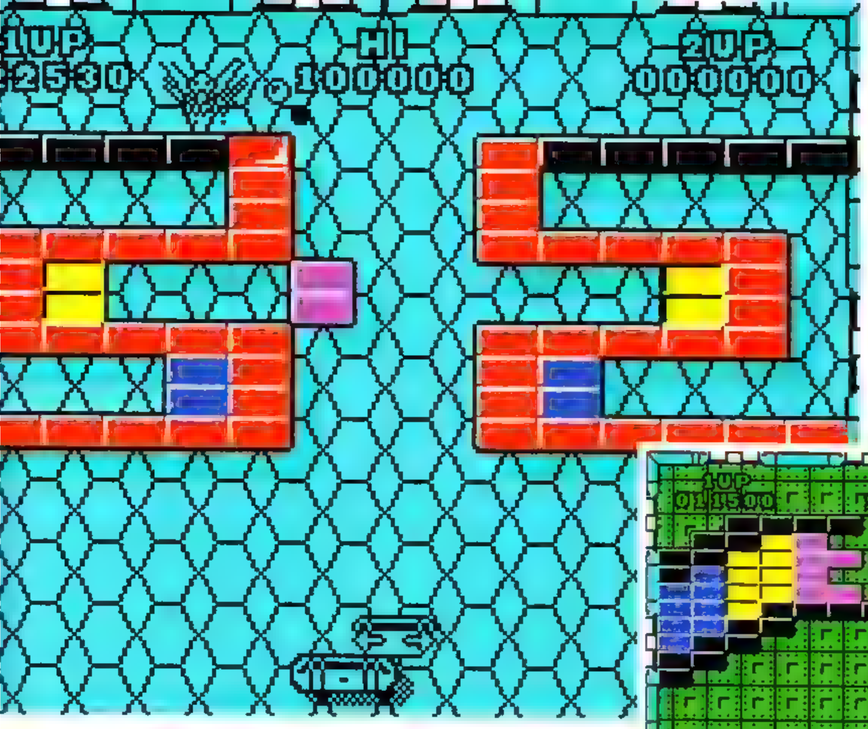
• Seven cars on screen at once! That's more that you see in the *Grand Theft Auto* games.

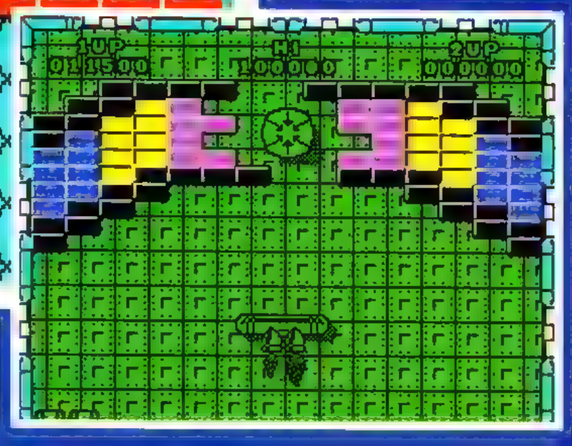


» The exchange has been made and you're stuck waiting for some old fool to cross the road!

TOP 25 spectrum games OF ALL TIME

SINCLAIR'S SPECTRUM MAY HAVE BEEN SMALL IN SIZE, BUT IT WAS BIG IN HEART, BOASTING A MASSIVE NUMBER OF GENUINELY FANTASTIC GAMES THAT STILL PLAY BRILLIANTLY TODAY. WE REVEAL THE FAN FAVOURITES THAT EVERY SERIOUS SPECTRUM OWNER SHOULD GET A CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE





Batty

- **Year:** 1987
- **Publisher:** Hit Pak

25 ***Arkanoid*** **may have received an extremely polished conversion on the humble ZX Spectrum, but it couldn't compete with this monumental epic from Hit Pak.**

Each level has been beautifully constructed, there are huge amounts of power-ups that include a bog-standard laser, your typical extender and a handy level warp, and there are also a variety of different options, including a wonderful co-op mode that effectively splits the bottom of the screen into two parts. You monitor one side of the screen, while a friend manages the other.

Add in some fiendishly well-put-together levels, some bold, cartoon-like visuals and some hellishly addictive gameplay and the end result is one of the best *Breakout* clones of all time. The fact that it was initially given away for free with *Your Sinclair* is absolutely staggering.

Cybernoid

- **Year:** 1988
- **Publisher:** Hewson Consultants

24 **Raffaele Cecco's wonderful** ***Cybernoid*** **harks back to the good old days when game testing was solely the responsibility of the developer, shoot-'em-ups were one of the most popular genres around and games required pixel-perfect timing in order to proceed.**

Cybernoid is possibly the toughest game in our top 25. It requires insane levels of concentration, dextrous keyboard and joystick skills and the patience of a saint. Despite this, *Cybernoid* always pulls us back for one more go and remains so polished you can almost see your face in it. What makes it so essential is its jaw-droppingly vibrant visuals, intricately designed levels and spot-on controls (it has the sort of pixel-perfect precision normally seen in platformers). It's not for everyone, but it's an experience that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

Nebulus

- **Year:** 1988
- **Publisher:** Hewson Consultants

23 **There's a veritable deluge of brilliant platformers and puzzle games available on the ZX Spectrum, but very rarely are these two rather distinct genres successfully combined.**

Nebulus – which is also known as *Tower Toppler* or *Castelian* depending on whereabouts you live – is a wonderful example of this combination of genres and sees you guiding a cute bipedal alien named Pogo to the top of several towers. Once at the top, these towers must then be detonated.

Working against a tight time limit, you're required to use lifts and handy doorways to zip back and forth through the cleverly rotating towers – a graphical feat that still manages to impress today – in order to avoid the tower's numerous enemies. As challenging to play as it is gorgeous to look at.

Fantasy World Dizzy

- **Year:** 1989
- **Publisher:** Codemasters

22 **Ever since Philip and Andrew Oliver's ovoid creation appeared in the** ***Ultimate Cartoon Adventure*** **we've always had a soft spot for Dizzy.** ***Fantasy World Dizzy*** **is not only Dizzy's greatest 8-bit adventure, it's also the very last 8-bit** ***Dizzy*** **adventure from the Oliver twins – development duties for the game's sequels were handed over to Big Red Software.**

The brothers certainly left on a high though. *Fantasy World Dizzy* is a huge, beautifully crafted adventure that features well-thought-out, and far better-balanced, puzzles, a new *Magic Knight*-style interface, the introduction of the Yolkfolk and a surprising amount of humour.

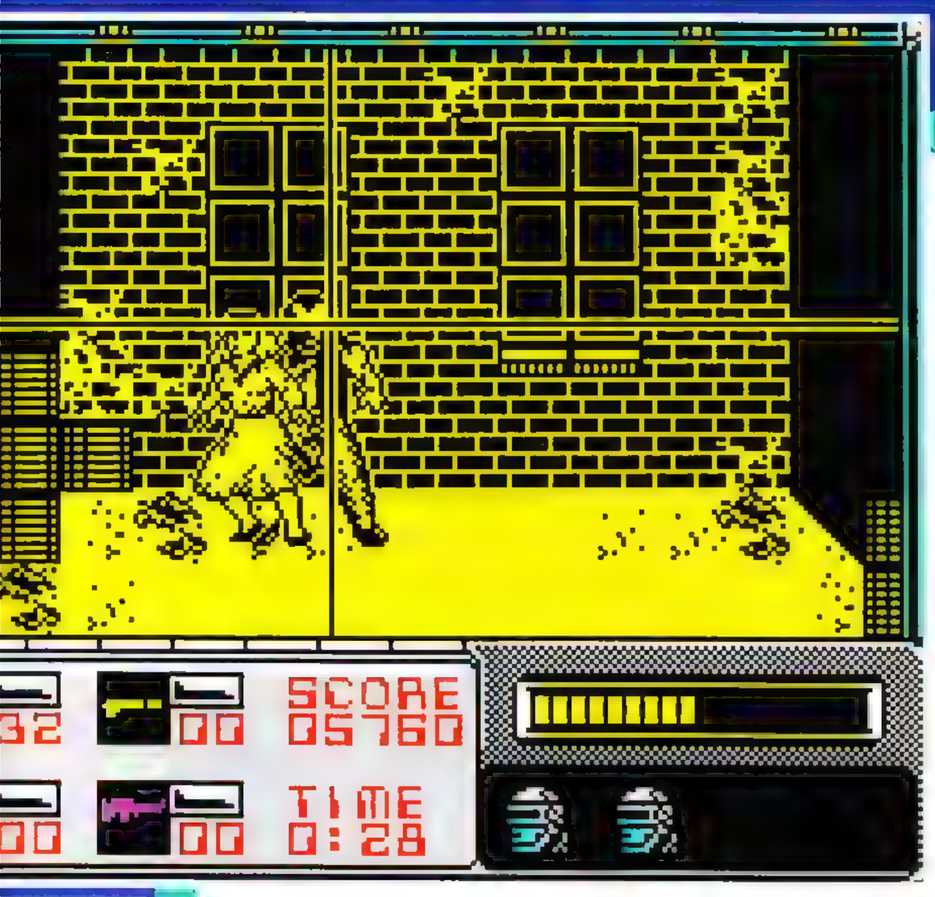
You may not be able to make an omelette without breaking a few eggs, but by not damaging their mascot the Oliver twins certainly proved that it was entirely possible to create an excellent arcade adventure.

'CYBERNOID IS POSSIBLY THE TOUGHEST GAME IN OUR LIST, REQUIRING INSANE CONCENTRATION, DEXTROUS JOYSTICK SKILLS AND THE PATIENCE OF A SAINT'

TOP 25

spectrum games

OF ALL TIME



RoboCop

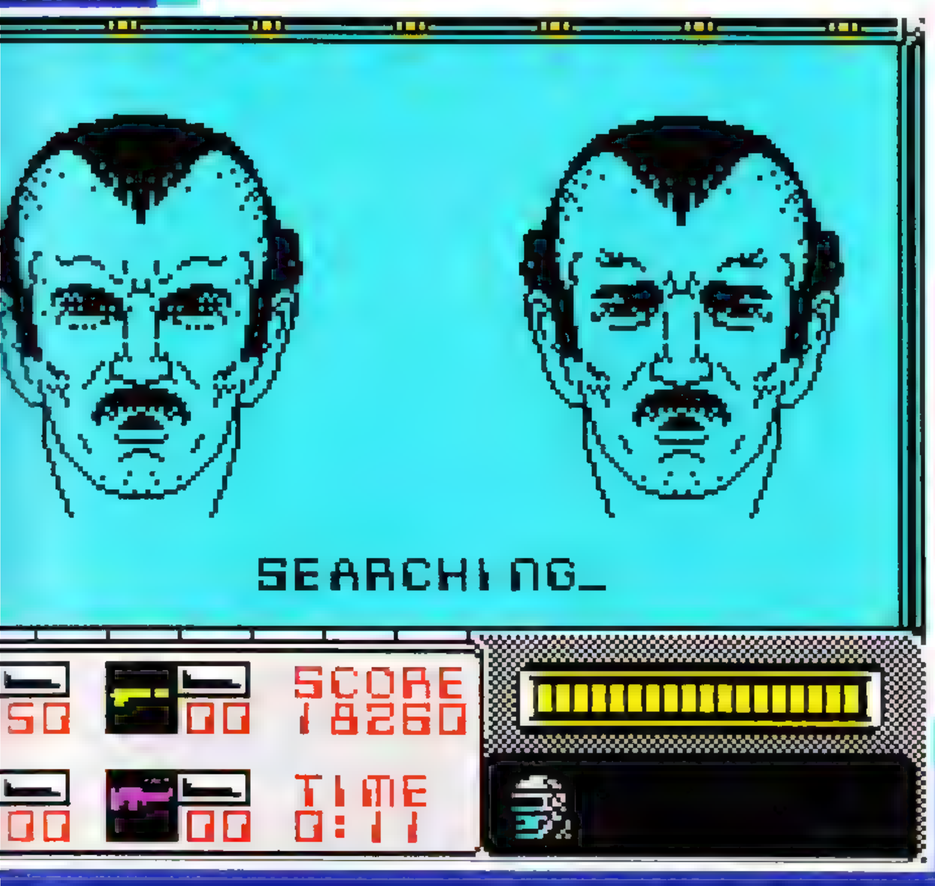
Year: 1989

Publisher: Ocean

21 **After churning out cheap-and-cheerful licensed dross like *Transformers*, *Knight Rider* and *Highlander*, Ocean turned a corner and began releasing quality movie tie-ins.**

RoboCop remains one of the best examples, and by using the template of the incoming Data East blaster and juxtaposing the action with clever mini-games, such as rescuing hostages and putting face IDs together, Ocean created a tie-in that few other developers (Ocean included) were able to improve upon.

The mostly monochrome visuals do a great job of capturing the spirit of the original film, and while the action is a little more pedestrian than we remember, it nevertheless remains great fun to play. Film and TV licences were ten a penny on the 8-bit computers and it's a testament to both Ocean's development skills and *RoboCop*'s enjoyable gameplay that it's the only example to make our list.



Sabre Wulf

Year: 1984

Publisher: Ultimate: Play the Game

20 **We've been playing Ultimate's brilliant *Sabre Wulf* for 28 years now and we still haven't been able to collect all four pieces of that sodding amulet. Not to worry, though, it simply allows us to appreciate what a staggering game Sabreman's first outing actually is.**

Taking place over an absolutely humongous 256 screens, you're required to do nothing more than explore the vast and varied jungle to recover the four aforementioned missing pieces of a precious amulet. Of course, as you would probably expect, this is much easier said than done, and Sabreman has to contend with some rather angry natives, the titular Sabre Wulf and all manner of horrible jungle critters before he's able to complete his lofty goal.

With its gorgeous visuals, fast-paced gameplay and massive environment, *Sabre Wulf* is typical of the care and attention to detail that the Stamper brothers put into all of their early Spectrum games, so don't be too surprised if you see a few more Ultimate games before our top 25 Spectrum games feature is finally complete.

Back To Skool

Year: 1985

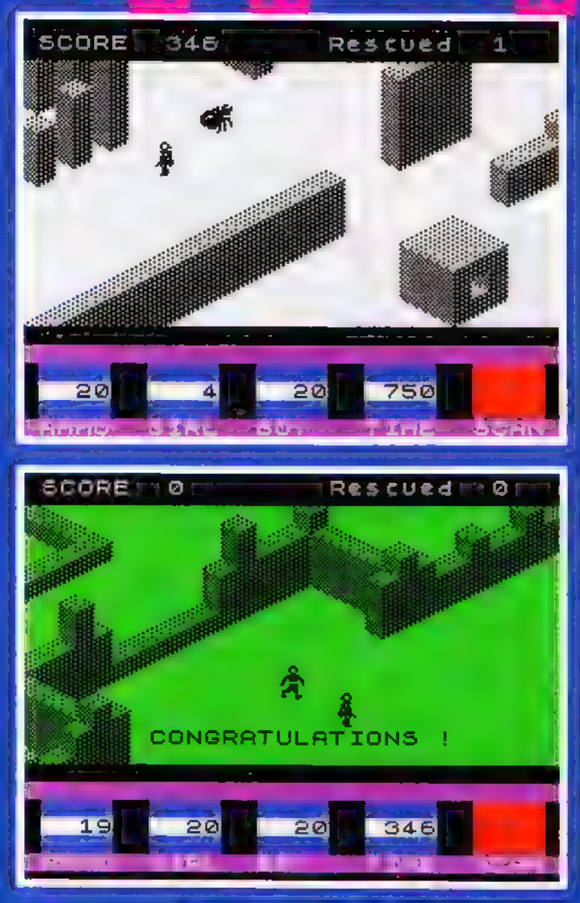
Publisher: Microsphere

19 **After wowing Spectrum owners with the brilliant *Skool Daze*, David Reidy and Keith Warrington returned a year later with a sequel that was even more ambitious.**

You were once again cast in the shorts and blazer of the mischievous Erik, but this time he was able to get up to even more mayhem and mischief. A new girl's school increased the playing area. Erik also had access to stink bombs and water pistols as well as his trusty catapult now, while it was even possible for the little scamp to catch mice and frogs (of which the former could be released in the girl's school). Other improvements to the original included the ability to ride a bike and the handy option of opening desks in order to discover what was hiding inside them.

Back To Skool still proved hard going for those used to being hand led through their games, but it still managed a level of interactivity that few other Spectrum titles have ever been able to match.

'BACK TO SKOOL PROVED HARD GOING, BUT IT STILL MANAGED A LEVEL OF INTERACTIVITY THAT FEW OTHER SPECTRUM TITLES HAVE EVER BEEN ABLE TO MATCH'



Ant Attack

- **Year:** 1983
- **Publisher:** Quicksilva

18

Predating *It Came From The Desert* by a good six years, Sandy White's *Ant Attack* remains a game of stark beauty and cunning gameplay. Taking control of either a young girl or a young boy – don't worry they control in exactly the same way – your task is to venture into the abstract walled city of Antescher in search of your missing beau.

While the first level is relatively easy – a quick hop, step and a jump over the wall and you're practically done – later stages are anything but, and it's here where White's true genius becomes apparent. Initially coming across as little more than a pile of hastily assembled Lego blocks, the city of Antescher soon reveals itself to be a deadly maze, where ants can jump out at you at any time.

Granted, you've got 20 grenades to take them on with, but the claustrophobia quickly sets in, and later levels became a frightening race against time as your ragged nerves deal with five or six ants, a missing loved one and a constantly ticking timer. Truly terrifying.

The Lords Of Midnight

- **Year:** 1984
- **Publisher:** Beyond Software

17

You'll never forget the first time you played Mike Singleton's *The Lords Of Midnight*. With its lavish packaging, accompanying overlay card and distinct gameplay, it proved that there was more to the Spectrum than simple platformers and arcade conversions, and it remains a very atmospheric title without equal.

What impresses most about *The Lords Of Midnight* is its flexibility. While the main objective is to lead your four adventurers on a quest to destroy the fabled Ice Crown, it's possible to forget the task completely and just concentrate on amassing a huge army. If that doesn't take your fancy you can just as easily combine the two into an epic adventure that few other 8-bit games could match.

Massive in scale – the pseudo-3D graphics display over 31,000 different views – and rich in atmosphere, *The Lords Of Midnight* is a Spectrum title that everyone should experience. If you're familiar with it, go back and play through it again. A true classic.

Turbo Esprit

- **Year:** 1986
- **Publisher:** Durrell

16

***Turbo Esprit*, not to be confused with the Gremlin game with a very similar name, is a criminally great sandbox game from the makers of *Harrier Attack*.**

This sublime little gem had you taking to the mean streets of Wellington, Gamesborough, Romford and Minster and indulging in a spot of covert stakeout-type drug busting.

Boasting bustling cities crammed with Durell's signature ant-looking denizens, staggering AI and a novel feeling of freedom, *Turbo Esprit* would later go on to become a major influence on Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto* series.

And while the game probably would have benefited from a slightly punchier title, such as '*Turbo Elite Cokehead Apprehender*', playing the game was still like being in your own episode of *Miami Vice*.

Quite simply there's nothing quite like it on the Speccy and so, for that reason, it's in.

TOP 25

spectrum games

OF ALL TIME

Jet Set Willy

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Software Projects

15 **We've all been there, the morning after the night before. In this case, a house party, probably the outcome of a careless exchange on a popular friendship website, has meant that Willy's mansion, after being packed to the rafters with beer guzzlers and winos, has now been alcoholically decimated.**

And to make matters worse for Willy, his lardy housekeeper has put her stomping foot down and is preventing poor Willy from going to bed, recharging the old batteries and promising to do something about the mess in the morning.

Matthew Smith's second house of pain was a sublime and simple platforming jaunt that built on the brilliance of *Manic Miner.*

Jet Set Willy was released into a swathe of high expectancy, both by gamers, preying that it would be as good, if not better, than the original, and by its publisher, who was hoping to make a shed load of cash – which was the reason that the game came packed with an annoying copy protection card.

Jet Set Willy's quirky and colourful palette, warped imagery and surrealist humour captured perfectly the irreverence of videogames of the time. And as it was built with the Spectrum in mind, it is widely considered to house the finest version of the game.

Chase HQ

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Taito

14 **Taito's wonderful pursuit racer still gets a lot of play in the Retro Gamer offices. While we would lovingly hand the best conversion accolade to the Amstrad for its colourful finesse, the Spectrum's offering does feel fractionally more fluid, especially when you're belting across *Chase HQ*'s quasi-3D tarmac, screaming, "Let's go Mr Driver!"**

The Speccy has been blessed with some truly brilliant racing games in its lifetime, but *Chase HQ* showcases a real eye for detail and technical ability from Ocean. An almost impractical chasm sat between the arcade machine and the ZX Spectrum, and yet, somehow, Ocean managed to rev the Porsche 928 to pretty much clunking-out point before flicking a nitro switch and jumping that gorge magnificently.

Chase HQ was blessed with an almost perfect home arcade port – easily up there with the likes of *Sega Rally* and *Buggy Boy.* It is the quintessential Spectrum racing game and was massively popular with Speccy owners back in the game's heyday… so popular, in fact, that *Your Sinclair* readers went on to vote it the best Spectrum game of all time.

'JET SET WILLY'S QUIRKY AND COLOURFUL PALETTE, WARPED IMAGERY AND HUMOUR CAPTURED THE IRREVERENCE OF VIDEOGAMES OF THE TIME'

Chuckie Egg

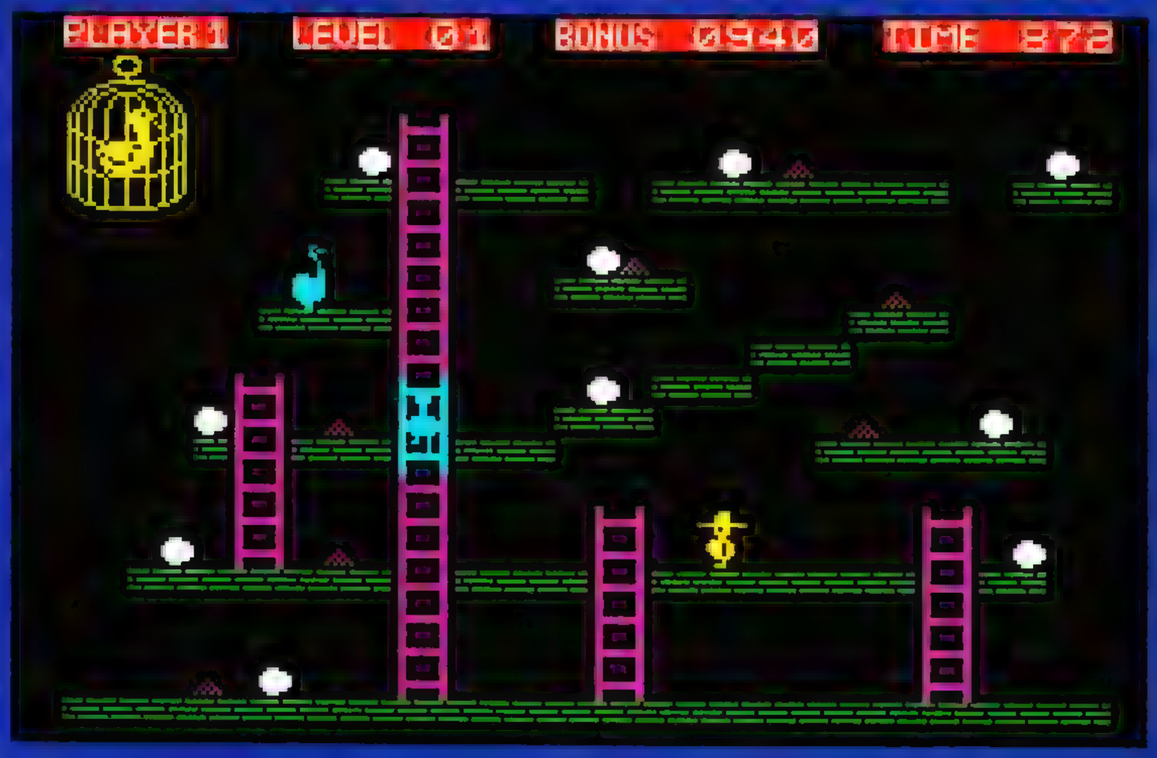
■ **Year:** 1984

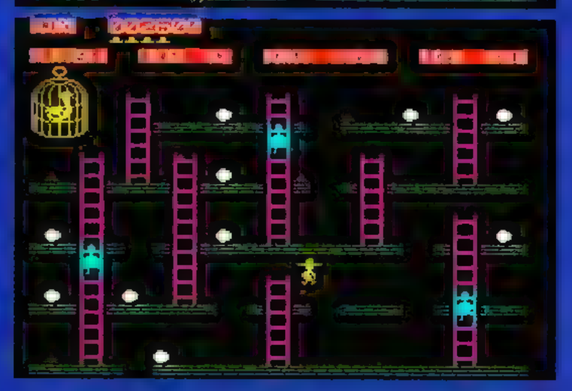
■ **Publisher:** A&F Software

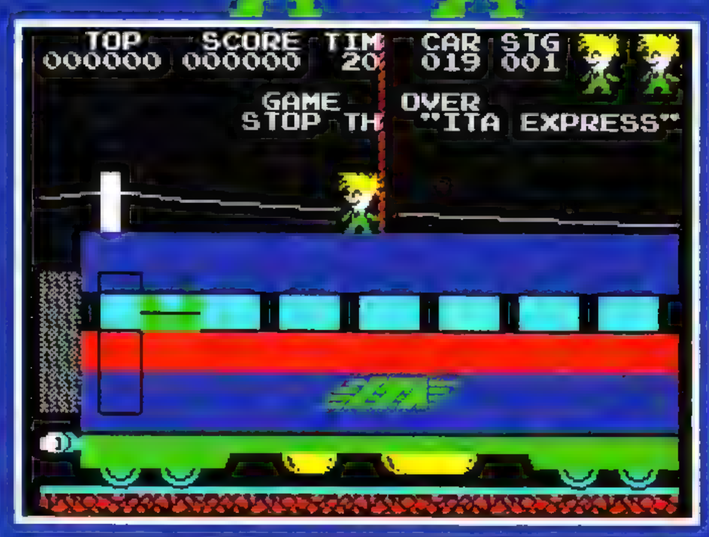
13 **Nigel Alderton's classic platformer is so ingrained in the minds of BBC owners that it's easy to forget it started off life as a Spectrum title (see RG 40 for details). Based on some of Alderton's favourite coin-ops, such as *Donkey Kong* and *Space Panic*, *Chuckie Egg* is an insanely fast platformer that sees hero Hen House Harry going up and down ladders and leaping across platforms in search of eggs, while avoiding the angry hens.**

Unlike other platformers of the time, which were more methodical and slower-paced, *'Eggy Kong'* (as it was originally known) dashed along at a cracking pace and really felt like it had escaped from your local arcade. It may have only had eight levels, but they were fiendishly designed and it wasn't until several loops had passed and the huge caged duck had been released that you began to appreciate just how expertly crafted they were.

It's not one of the Spectrum's most original platformers, but there's no denying that it's one of the most polished. A classic in every sense.







Stop The Express

Year: 1983

Publisher: Sinclair Research Ltd

If we're honest, 12th seems a little meagre for this sublime Hudson title, but the reasoning is this: there really is an abundance of top-notch games on the Spectrum.

Chunky arcade-style graphics, quirky premise and compulsive playability sum up all the factors that make a classic retro game, and *Stop The Express* succeeds in ticking all those boxes.

Playing a shaggy-haired blonde chap in green pyjamas, it was your job to stop a train by fighting your way from one end to the other. Trying to put a leaf on your track were 'train gangsters' who could be felled by grabbing and kicking 'snake birds' at them. Brilliant.

After you'd traversed the first ten carriages from the rooftops, the game put you inside the train, where you had to avoid more dagger throwers and the ectoplasm of trundling ghosts.

Stop The Express is a simple and beautiful Speccy game. We believe a "Congraturation! You sucsess!" is firmly in order here.

TLL

Year: 1984

Publisher: Vortex Software

If you're the sort of Spectrum owner who's constantly hounded by C64 and Amstrad owners, show them Vortex Software's amazing *TLL* and watch them shut up faster than a superglued clam.

Created by Costa '*Deflektor*' Panayi, *Tornado Low Level* (to give it its full title) is an insanely slick looking title that features some of the smoothest and flicker-free scrolling you're ever likely to see on Sir Clive's humble 8-bit.

Taking control of a Tornado jet, you're simply required to fly around and participate in strategically placed missile strikes. There are no actual enemies and nothing to shoot at; it's just your fighter, a constantly dropping fuel supply and plenty of hazards – trees, houses, telephone wires – to avoid.

It sounds simple, boring even, but this couldn't be further from the truth. *TLL* requires a cool nerve, insane gameplay skills and a hefty pair of balls – you have to fly dangerously close to the ground to bomb your targets – and is not for the faint-hearted.

Those feeling the need for speed, however, will discover a title that's not only graphically amazing, but, more importantly, has the actual gameplay to back it up. Stunning. Simply stunning.

Starquake

Year: 1985

Publisher: Bubble Bus

Stephen Crow's *Starquake* may share many similarities with a typical Ultimate release – brilliantly drawn visuals, engaging gameplay, strong main character – but extended play soon reveals it to be something quite different.

Essentially a cross between a shoot-'em-up, platformer and an adventure game, *Starquake* is a fun title that casts you in the form of BLOB (Bio-Logically Operated Being) who must find the missing parts of his crashed spaceship.

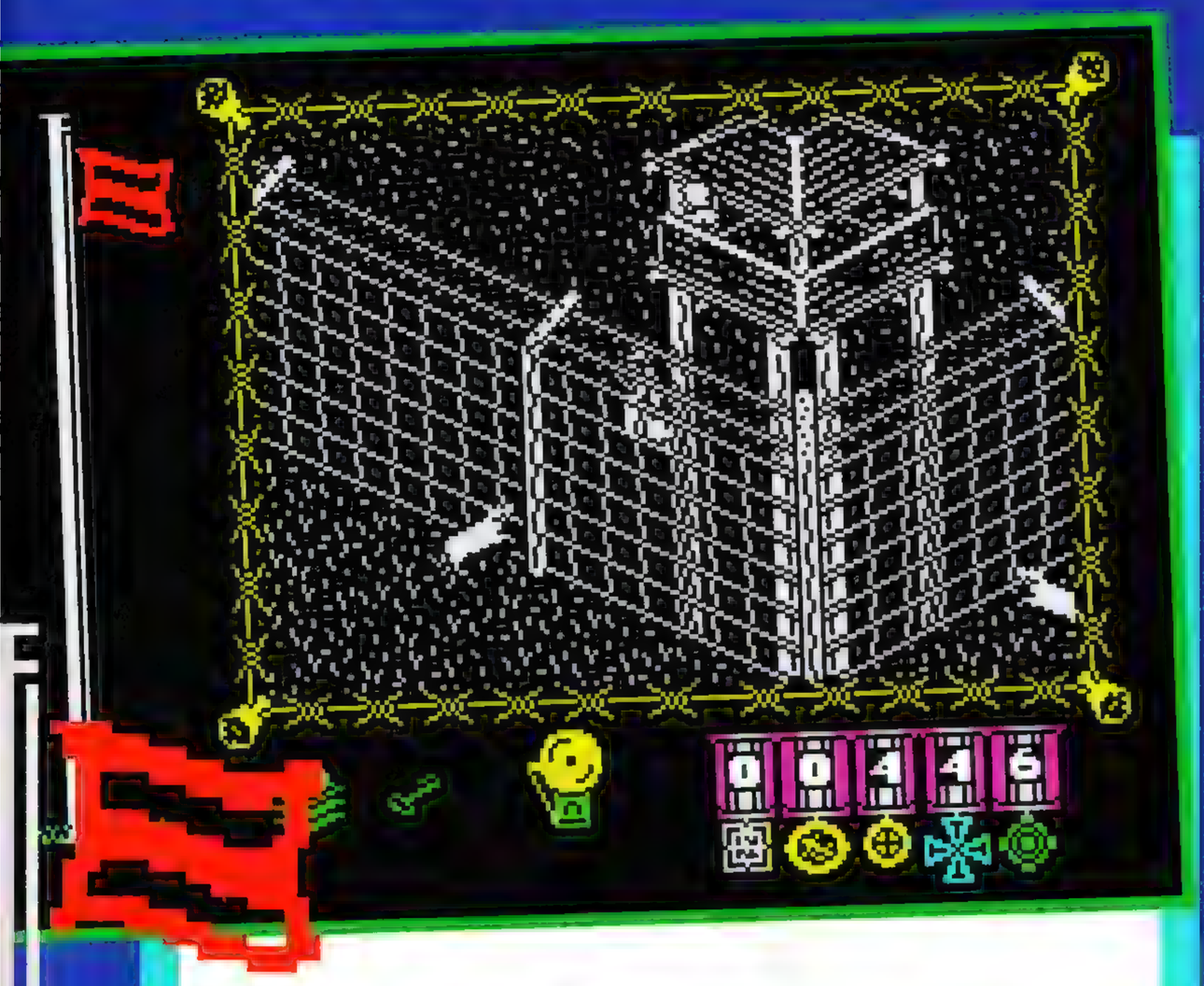
Fortunately, in order to make traversing the huge – 512 screens – planet easier, BLOB has a number of handy abilities. As well as being incredibly fast – the game pelts along at a cracking pace – he can create platforms, which last for a limited time, to reach out of the way areas, or he can simply jump on to a nearby hoverboard (although this makes it impossible for him to pick up items). There are even handy teleports to use, therefore making the gigantic world far more manageable.

With its beautifully drawn visuals, clever mishmash of genres and addictive gameplay, *Starquake* manages to deliver an experience that's quite unlike any other Spectrum release. Visit the World Of Spectrum website today to discover its magic for yourself.

TOP 25

spectrum games

OF ALL TIME



The Great Escape

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

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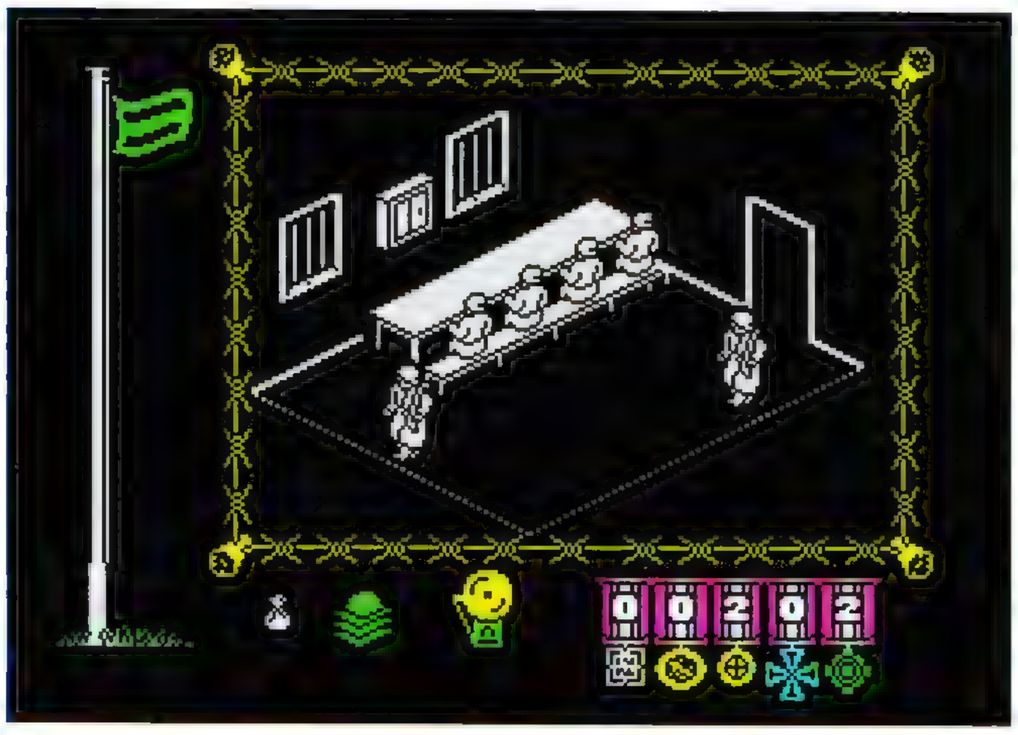
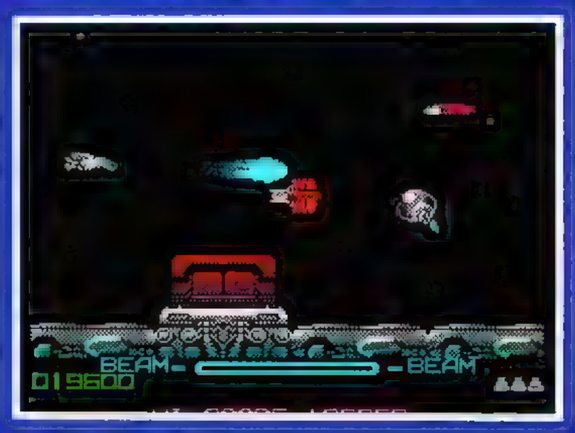
This hazy movie tie-in by Denton Design proved to be a very surprising hit for Ocean when it was released on the Spectrum. *The Great Escape* plonked the player into a peculiar monochrome ritual of breakfast, roll calls and wily absconding.

It was a brilliantly designed game that brimmed with a stellar cast of innovative ideas – it offered various different escape routes from the camp and your hero would automatically adhere to the camp's routines if you left him to his own devices for too long. *The Great Escape* proved to be a trailblazing Spectrum classic that benefited from the computer's small colour palette by coating the game in a tense cheer-destroying bleakness.

It also helped to give movie tie-ins some credibility, dragging the much-reviled genre out of solitary confinement and proving that it could fit in with the rest of the law-abiding game genres that existed at that time.





R-Type

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Electric Dreams

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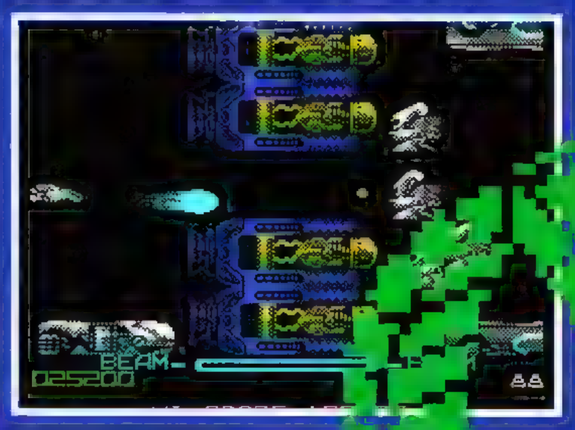
It's been 24 years now and we still can't work out how Bob Pape and Mark Jones pulled off this stunning conversion (if you're reading guys, we'd love to hear from you).

Anyway, *R-Type* on the Spectrum is a thing of beauty and is easily the best arcade conversion to grace the machine. The graphics are incredible, with huge, brightly coloured sprites, very little colour clash, insanely smooth scrolling and amazing looking bosses. Level layout throughout is virtually identical, with many classic scenes from the arcade original being instantly recognisable, making for a wonderfully authentic experience.

It wasn't just *R-Type*'s gob-smacking visuals that impressed, as its gameplay was just as finely honed. The force might not have been as responsive as its arcade parent, but that's our only niggle, everything else – enemy placement, movement and structure – is near identical, meaning that many of the tricks can be pulled off perfectly. An astounding conversion that proved to Amstrad and C64 owners that the Spectrum was still a force to be reckoned with.



Knight Lore

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Ultimate

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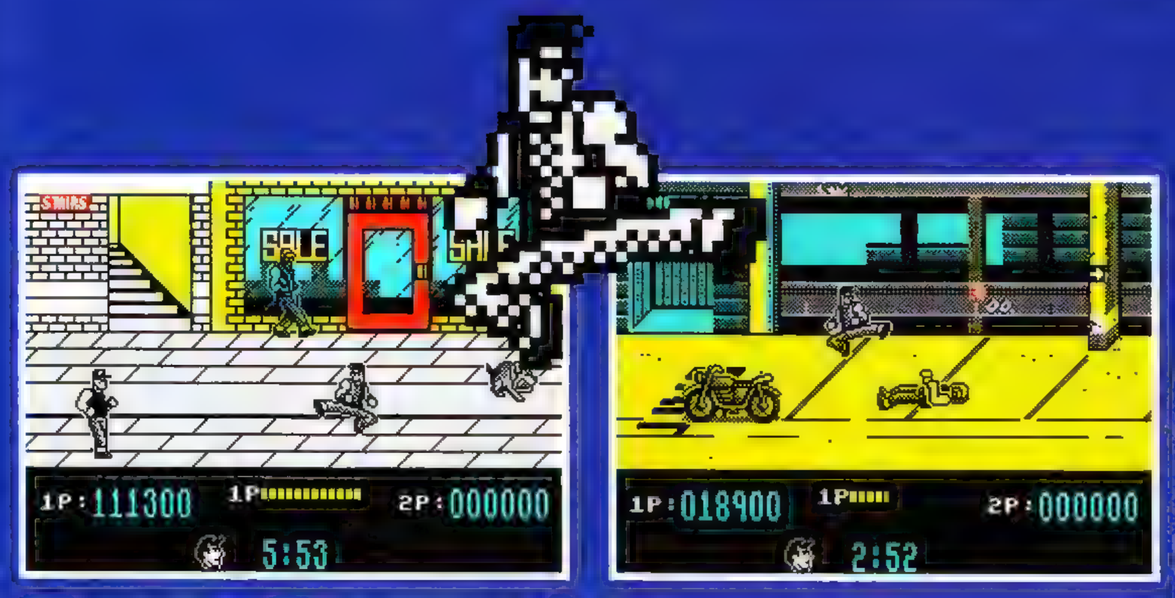
Sabreman returns, but this time he's gone isometric! After wowing gamers with titles such as *Jetpac*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Pssst*, Ultimate ushered in a new era of Spectrum visuals by dressing up Sabreman in some brand new isometric clothing.

Granted, an isometric Spectrum game was certainly nothing new – take a bow 3D *Ant Attack*. However, Ultimate's new 'Filmation' engine pushed the unique-looking style to previously unseen levels and delivered a title that was both stunning to look at and an absolute joy to play through.

After receiving a wolf bite at the end of *Sabre Wulf*, Sabreman has to explore the enormous castle and create the potion that will help to free him from his lycanthropic curse. Along the way he also has to deal with some incredibly fiendish puzzles that require critical timing, fast reflexes and plenty of skill. Oh, and did we mention that the poor blighter turns into a werewolf every evening?

Constantly imitated (most notably by Ultimate itself), but very rarely bettered, *Knight Lore* is a gloriously fun adventure that not only helped to cement the Stamper brothers as a force to be reckoned with, but also proved that Sir Clive Sinclair's humble 8-bit machine still had the ability to pleasantly surprise.



Target Renegade

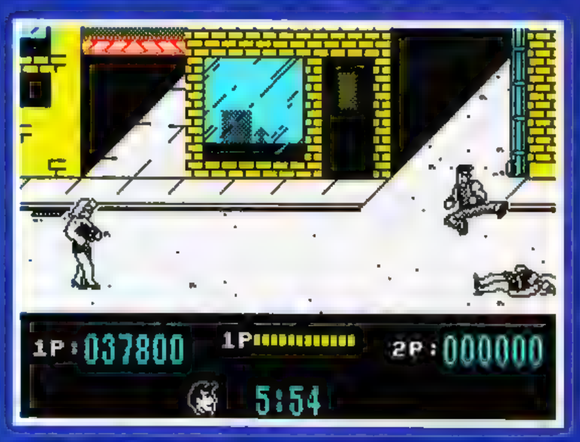
■ **Year:** 1988

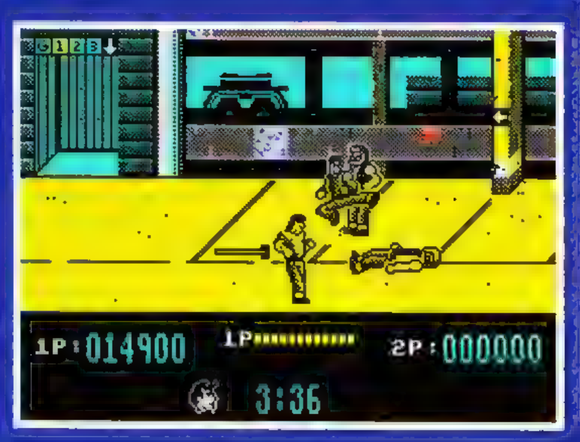
■ **Publisher:** Imagine

What do you do when you release a hit conversion of a popular arcade game that's never been blessed with a proper sequel? If you're Imagine Software you simply release your own unofficial spin-off that's even better than the arcade original.

With its bold, cartoony visuals, incredibly violent gameplay and frantic two-player action, Imagine's *Target Renegade* instantly captured the hearts of those arcade gamers who were obsessed with Technos' *Double Dragon* and delivered a home experience that no other fighter of the time was able to match.

Never mind that the plot's flimsier than a house of cards and has the disgraced gangs trying to redeem their honour by killing the renegade and his identical twin brother – *Target Renegade* was all about the action and Imagine did not disappoint. Punches, vicious knees to the groin and flying kicks were just a few of the moves the brothers had access to, while weapons like hammers, chains and even pool cues could be used to dish out additional hurt to your hapless foes. Excellent stuff.





Manic Miner

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Publisher:** Bug-Byte

For further insight into the nutty world of *Manic Miner* head over to page 64 and read our in-depth 'Making of'. *Manic Miner* created many imitators, but none quite reached the heights of the original. It is the Spectrum's best platformer and a stunning example of the genre.

Despite being only 20 screens long – although it would take you some time to finish – *Manic Miner* proved to be the crowning jewel of Smith's short-lived career and delivered an experience that, if we're truly honest, Smith never had a fair chance of succeeding. Indeed, it's very much platform perfection.

Every enemy is well placed, the structure of each platform feels almost organic, while the pixel-perfect jumping will never – for the most part – test your patience. With its jaunty opening, boot-stomping ending and bizarre enemies, Smith's game proved to be a masterpiece that, 25 years later, still manages to impress.

An utterly ingenious piece of programming that shows just how far you can go with sheer talent and a very healthy imagination.

Elite

■ **Year:** 1985

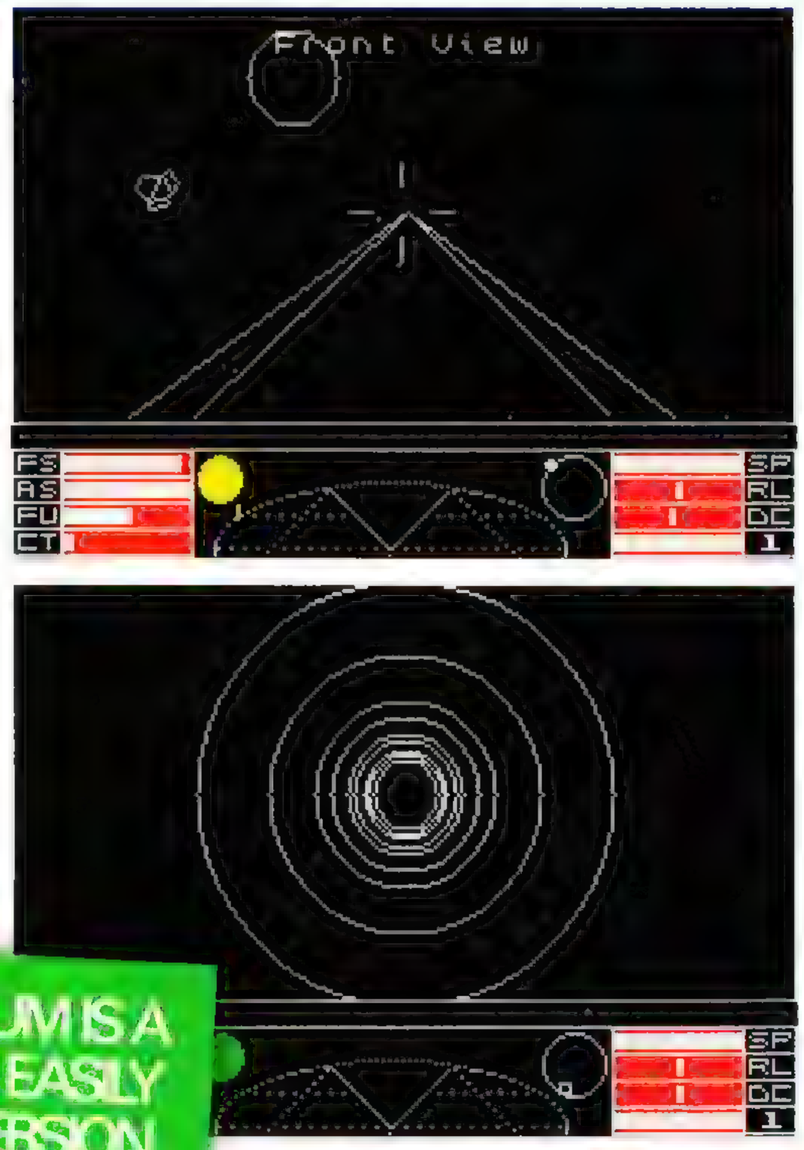
■ **Publisher:** Firebird Software

We came extremely close to leaving *Elite* out of our top 25 list altogether, mainly due to its heavy association with the BBC home computer. However, after giving it a little bit of thought, we suddenly realised that there's no other Spectrum game out there that offers the same kind of unique experience as *Elite*.

With Firebird owning the rights to a glut of new systems and David Braben and Ian Bell busy at work on other conversions, it was left to another developer, Torus to handle the highly anticipated Spectrum conversion of the hit game. Fortunately though, the end result was a highly accurate re-creation of the original BBC release that not only offered the same sense of wonder and astonishment that the BBC and Acorn outings had delivered a year earlier, but even added a few original touches of its own.

Armed with nothing more than a Cobra Mk III and 100 credits, the universe of *Elite* is literally your oyster and you're given a real sense of freedom that is incomparable in other Spectrum releases. It might be a little more sluggish when compared to its BBC counterpart, but the same gripping and absorbing gameplay remained, and Torus even had the foresight to include several new missions that had never actually appeared in the BBC and Acorn originals. Ultimately though, for all its cosmetic changes, this was *Elite* through and through and it instantly received rave reviews from popular magazines such as *Crash* and *Sinclair User*.

With its sandbox gameplay, moral dilemmas – did you always play as the good guy, or occasionally go after some easy bounties? – and beautiful – if rather stark – wireframe visuals, *Elite* remains a true classic that no self-respecting gamer, Spectrum or otherwise, should go without experiencing at least once in their lives.



'R-TYPE ON THE SPECTRUM IS A THING OF BEAUTY AND IS EASILY THE BEST ARCADE CONVERSION TO GRACE THE MACHINE'

TOP 25

spectrum games

OF ALL TIME

Head Over Heels

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

After the arrival of *Knight Lore* in 1984, virtually every videogame publisher began jumping on the isometric bandwagon, desperate to cash in on what was becoming a rapidly popular genre. Despite many fine efforts – the majority of them usually being from Ultimate – none have ever come close to the sheer brilliance of John Ritman's utterly sublime *Head Over Heels*.

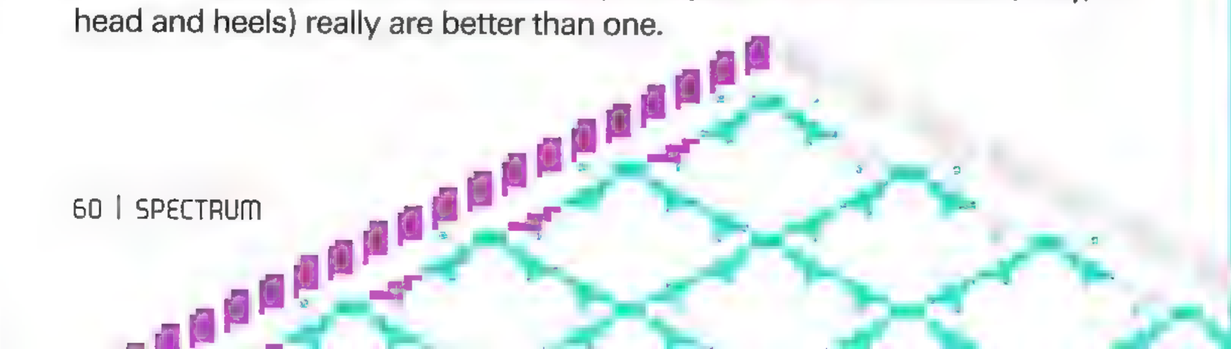
After cutting his isometric teeth on the thoroughly enjoyable *Batman*, Ritman's next project would be far more ambitious and included more devious puzzles, many, many more screens to explore, and, in a twist that was highly original for the time, two distinctive characters for the player to control; each with their own special abilities.

Head was a large-nosed... well, head... with a pair of stubby wings that enabled him to make mighty jumps and also glide for short periods, while Heels was an adorable puppy-like creature whose huge feet allowed him to quickly move through Bernie Drummond's surreal-looking environments. Originally known as 'Foot & Mouth' the duo are not only insanely cute (no easy task when you're dealing with a limited amount of pixels), but instantly recognisable to anyone from the 8-bit era.

Initially trapped in the bowels of Blacktooth Castle, your first task is to actually escape. These early screens are not only filled with some brilliantly conceived puzzles, but also act as the perfect tutorial for both Head and Heels' skills. Of course, once you've struggled through these first 40-odd rooms and managed to escape, your adventure not only truly begins, but Ritman also plays his masterstroke by revealing that the two odd-looking fellows can be combined to create one super-being.

It's not only a brilliant touch, but also enabled Ritman to create even more devious puzzles, as you were now forced to tackle rooms in a variety of different ways, with many of the later screens requiring a considerable amount of head scratching before you could finally move forward.

Spread across a total of five huge planets (each with its own distinct themes), and populated with some truly wacky sprites – Bernie Drummond created everything from a Prince Charles-headed Dalek to staircases made out of puppies – *Head Over Heels* is an unmissable adventure that's not only filled with enough charm to sink a battleship, but proves that two heads (okay, a head and heels) really are better than one.



Chaos

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Games Workshop

Julian Gollop lent his brain to some of the finest strategy games to appear on the 8-bit micros. His greatest works include: *Laser Squad*, *Lords Of Chaos*, and the sublime *Rebelstar*.

Set on the planet of Limbo, *Chaos* was a very early and deceptively deep strategy game. If you've ever wondered why Games Workshops still seem to inhabit the high streets, or considered taking that plunge into the 'strat-o'-fear', then you should really make *Chaos* the next game you boot up and play. But be warned, set aside a quiet afternoon because it's annoyingly addictive.

Beginning with a series of questions to help you create your hero and set you on course for the wonderful world of wizard duelling, the game then gave you the keys to a messy magical melee against up to seven other wizardly foes.

Okay, the graphics looked crude, and it wouldn't do much to impress any of your C64 and CPC chums, but its rudimentary look made getting a head around all the spells and rules of engagement more accessible.

After you had created your wizard, he would be blessed with a random collection of spells to help you vanquish your opponents.

The most innovative feature about *Chaos* was the fact that during play, being that your spells were purposefully temperamental little buggers, there was no guarantee that they would actually work.

The more potent the spell, the higher the risk of seeing it seize up on you. So while the Giant Rats were reliable, trying to persuade your Speccy to let you have access to one of *Chaos*'s bashful Golden Dragons would prove a little trickier.

To improve your odds you could cast some of the smaller spells to influence the laws of the game board and make opting for the stronger enemies less of a gamble, opening up a world of tactical possibilities.

3D Deathchase

Year: 1983

Publisher: Micromega

Now if you're a tree hugger, tree surgeon or a puppet you might want to avert your eyes, because this is a game that will more than likely cause you to grab the closest chainsaw and stick it into the nearest available hunk of wood.

Yes, this game does absolutely nothing for relations between humans and trees, but tons for the Speccy, 9K and gamer dealings. Now there really is only one word to describe *3D Deathchase* and that word is: trees.

So, out of the billion or so Spectrum titles that were ever released, why should *3D Deathchase* be considered the zenith of the machine? After all, many magazines of the day weren't overly kind towards the game when it was released.

Sinclair User awarded the game a measly 60% and the oracle of Spectrum gaming *Your Sinclair*, weren't massive fans of the game either. It took Stuart Campbell to right past wrongs when he compiled and wrote the magazine's Top 100 Speccy games of all time list and reserved the number one spot for this brilliantly simple game.

Admittedly, the game is blessed with the most inanimate of enemies: trees. So yes, to some it might sound like a profoundly stupid idea in principle, and with a lot of green, blue or black – depending on whether you were on 'night patrol' – permeated with plenty of lofty orangey thick lines, it would be fair to say that it didn't really look all that fantastic neither.

We would have loved to have been in the room when Mervyn Estcourt pitched his idea to Micromega though…

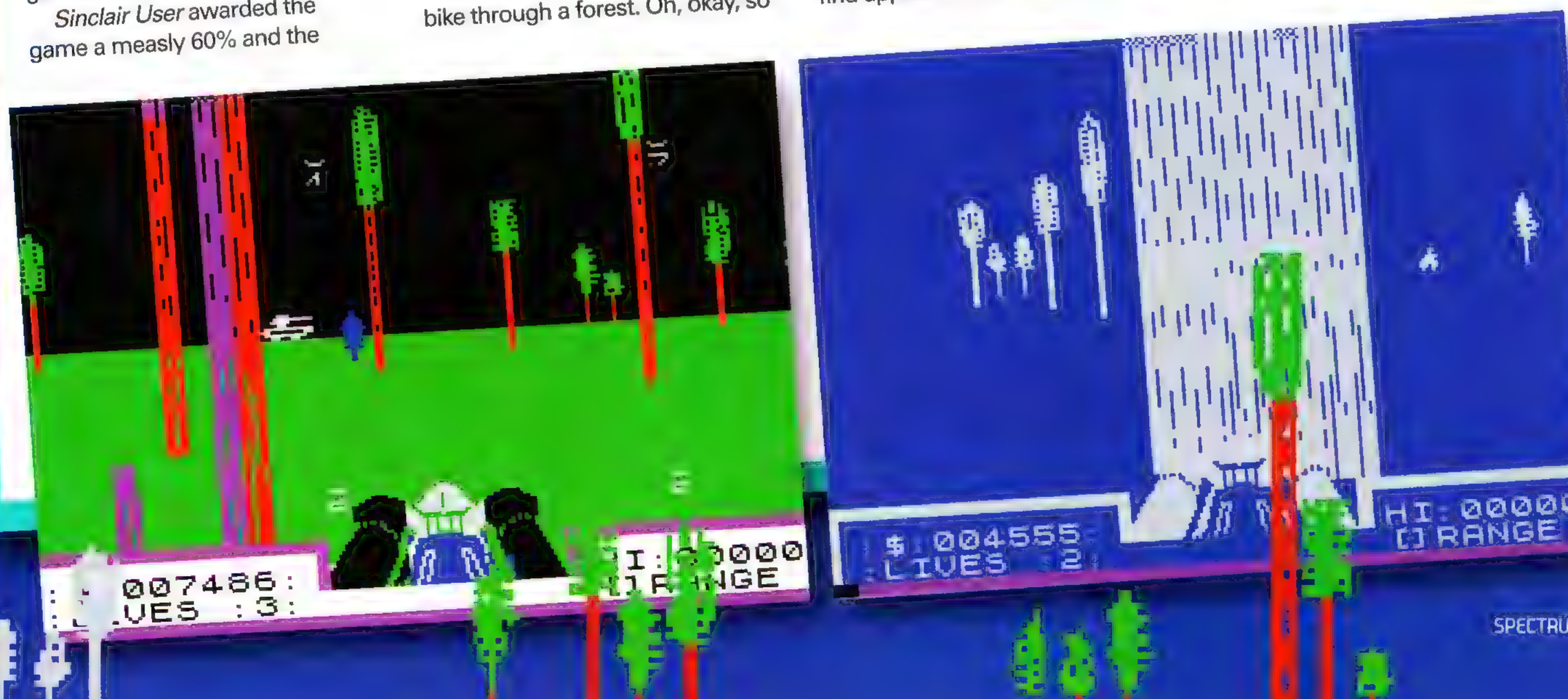
"So then Mervyn, just so I'm 100 per cent clear on this. You want to make a pseudo-3D *Space Invaders* game about driving a bike through a forest. Oh, okay, so what do you have to fight? Other bikes, okay, and these bikes, they can fight back right? They can't fight back, okay, right, so where's the actual threat, where are the enemies in your game? The trees you say, as in the green leafy things outside? And these trees, you're giving them guns right?"

Playing a futuristic bounty hunter, *3D Deathchase* found you swerving through bountiful forests of ever-increasing density to chase and blow up two brightly coloured motorcyclists. Your enemies rely on astonishing driving abilities to draw you into groups of trees, with the hope that the Ents dish out some tree-hurt.

The greatest aspect about *3D Deathchase* was the sheer simplicity of the thing. The whole principle of the game was to avoid and invade. And the game occasionally threw in mothership-style bonus targets that allowed you to earn extra points.

Star Wars fans would probably find appeal from its peculiar similarity to the speeder bike chases in *Return Of The Jedi*, and wannabe Jedis would lovingly replay the scenes by booting up the game in tandem with a rather rich imagination.

The game also featured brilliantly swift scrolling and, with the trees on the later stages coming at you at breakneck speeds, an ingenious and visually fathomable difficulty curve was brought to the game. And when the game switched from day to night, the menacing dark sky would cause the pursuit to become a shade twitchier and destroying those skittish bikes that extra bit harder. It was all in your head though and, secretly, you knew it. You could never get angry at *3D Deathchase*, though. With all of the game's win/lose elements so clearly defined, unwittingly becoming one with nature was always of your own doing. A genius game, with a genius concept… quite simply: genius. *3D Deathchase*, we salute you.



THE CLASSIC GAME

Trashman

Cyclists

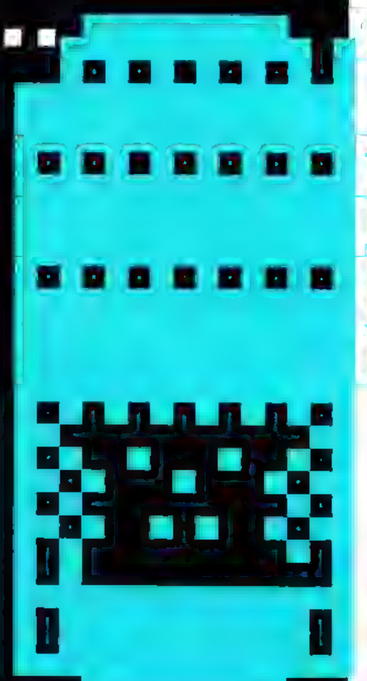
Watch out for cyclists pedalling down the pavement. Get struck by one and the collision will cause Trashman to temporarily limp, slowing him down.

Cars

Despite taking place in a leafy suburb, the streets are surprisingly full of speeding fools, all driving identical-looking cars.

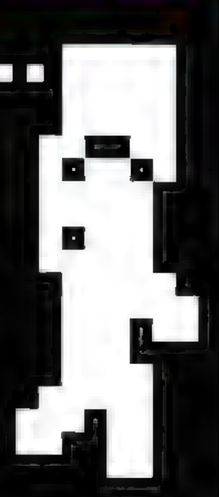
Dustcart

Slowly making its way up the road is the dustcart, which is where Trashman must deposit the garbage. He has to be quick, though, as it won't wait around.



Trashman

Our hero, the hard-working Trashman, might be working to an incredibly tight schedule, but he still has to make time for his customers.



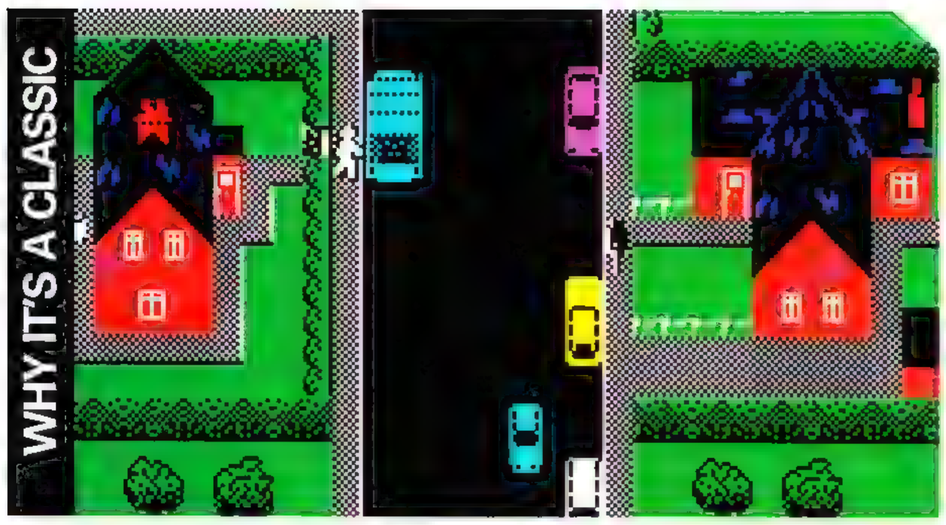
Proving that you could make a great game out of pretty much any subject if you approached it in the right way, *Trashman* was anything but a load of old rubbish. As a lowly refuse collector, it was your job to clean up the streets, literally, by clearing up the garbage of little computer people and being careful not to get killed by speeding lunatics, bitten by crazed dogs or crashed into by idiot cyclists. Stuart Hunt likes to get down and dirty.

Customers

If Trashman clears a bin without standing on their grass, the owner will invite him in for a nice chat. It's all a bit *Confessions Of A Dustman*.

Dustbins

These are the objects of your desire. With each street you have to clear a mandatory number of bins before you can proceed to the next.



Good clean trashy fun

Thanks to the likes of *Manic Miner*, *Monty Mole* and *Paperboy*, working class heroes were well represented in videogames during the Eighties, but none of those classic titles captured the spirit of their associated job as successfully as *Trashman*. The little touches, humour and impressive attention to detail in its sedate gameplay made it such a joy to play. Graphically it ticked all the boxes too, with its top-down viewpoint providing the perfect overview of its colourful streets. It's a unique game with timeless gameplay, and that's why it's a classic.

The little things

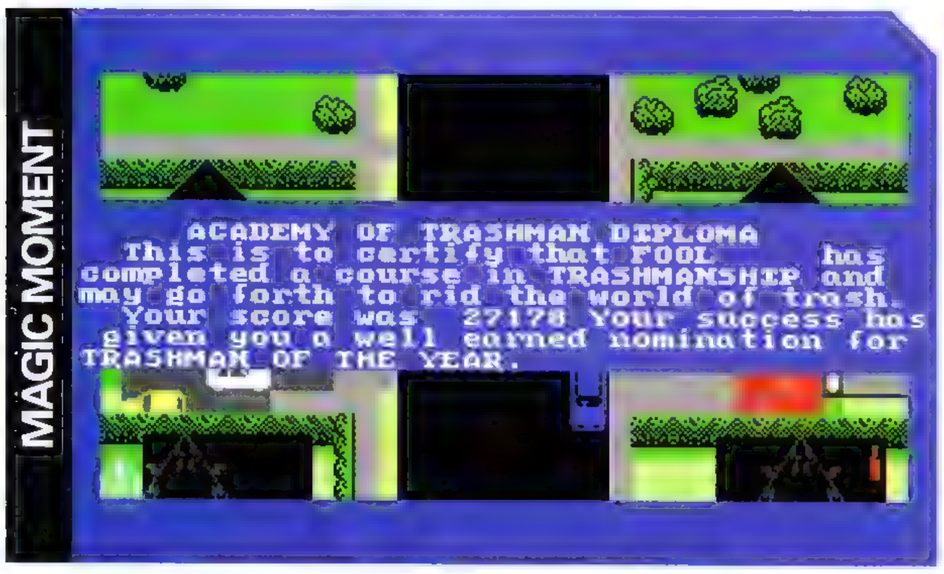
Fusing elements of *Frogger* with *Paperboy*, what makes *Trashman* so entertaining is its design. Its gameplay essentially boiled down to helping Trashman avoid dangers to clear enough rubbish in an allotted amount of time. While this probably doesn't sound all that interesting on paper, the well-realised streets are what bring the whole experience to life. *Trashman* is full of nice little ideas that make it more involving, from naming your dustman and having your bonus time docked for trampling on well-tended lawns, to getting a peek behind the curtains of the bizarre lives of your customers.

Man at work

If you're wondering how *Trashman* managed to take a laborious job and turn it into an entertaining computer game then allow us to explain. With each street you are given a requisite number of bins to empty. Once collected from the customers' front gardens, you must carry the bins to the dustcart, empty them out and then return them. You have to be mindful of busy traffic, cyclists and dangerous mutts, but mostly of a depleting bonus score, which is also your time limit. Fortunately, you can earn more time by stopping to chat to the snitching bozos to earn tips.

The old ones are the best ones

A strong part of *Trashman*'s charm is its quintessential British humour. There are a number of game references smattered throughout – from Trashman's delight at receiving a free Spectrum from a concerned mum, to a reference to creator Malcolm Evans' earlier hit *3D Monster Maze* when one customer offers him a copy. By far the most edgy gag in the entire game, though, occurs when Trashman is knocked down by a speeding car. Spelling the end of our hero, a news flash reporting on his death pops up on screen, and in the same story tastelessly mentions the favourite for the 'Trashman of the year' awards.



Kissing goodbye to a busy week

Our favourite moment in *Trashman* has been when completing a week's work, earning a diploma and finishing the game. It's not easy to do. The final street has you collecting a staggering 12 bins, and when you empty the final one its owner will invite you in for a quick drink. Take up the offer and Trashman will emerge from the house as Trashedman, completely sozzled and unsteady on his feet. It provides a funny close to the game that sees you helping the staggering hero slowly saunter to the end of his route in one piece. You can decline the drink, but you'll be missing out on a nice tip.

Dustman's holiday

After working his socks off, our hero took a busman's holiday for the sequel. *Travel With Trashman* saw the binman take his refuse-collection talents around different places on the globe. With elements of a business management sim, given that you must earn and manage your cash to buy tickets to each exotic destination, the sequel had our hero collecting up rubbish in some pretty unusual situations. A trip to Spain finds him collecting bouquets in a bullring, while the outside of a Parisian café is the setting for an outbreak of frogs. It's an entertaining sequel but not a patch on the original.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NEW GENERATION SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM EVANS
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** ACTION
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

What the press said... ages ago

Crash, 83%

"*Trashman* is an immensely playable game that is very addictive at first, but I think that quality might wear off after a while. Nevertheless, it's the best game that New Generation have produced yet."

What we think

It's an unusual game that has aged brilliantly. Indeed, if you've never played this evocative classic then we urge you to do so immediately. You won't regret getting your hands dirty.

THE MAKING OF... MANIC MINER

Sat at the very desk where it was written, Matthew Smith watches Miner Willy leap through all 20 screens of his Spectrum masterpiece. Paul Drury holds the ashtray and takes notes

CENTRAL CAVERN

"This was the test screen, the first of everything," begins Matt. "The collapsing floors, conveyor belts, the jumps, the colour clash. Using two colours in the bricks of the solid platforms and then when you jump up on to the first platform, that's all testing for colour clash. It has one of all the difficult jumps in, too." How was difficulty determined, we ask. "From the end of the conveyor belt to the higher platform counts as a difficult jump... but I put in a safety net. I plotted it out on graph paper: two pixels and then a parabolic, acceleration down until you hit terminal velocity, at about four pixels a frame, then you started falling straight down. I'd do all the testing and see where you'd land." And what about the clockwork baddie on the conveyor belt? "Oh, just something I'd drawn. There's a bit of Yellow Submarine in him – that's where the mouth in the belly came from. The original sketches I did had water instead of conveyor belts. There were going to be streams of water and I was thinking about making it impossible to go backwards. That would make it more of a puzzle – working out how to get somewhere without going upstream – but by the time I started coding, they'd become conveyor belts."

THE COLD ROOM

Matt stares intently at the 'keys' on this level. "They're snowshoes. Well, tennis rackets." He then starts tapping the screen before we gently remind him it isn't a touchscreen. "Mmm, oh, right. I was just thinking about tweaking a pixel. I'm not sure if it would be better light or dark. I must have tried it both ways back then." Ever the perfectionist. And what about the shuffling birdies? "Everyone knows penguins are fully signed up members of the funny animals union." As Willy slowly descends the 'chimney', Matt chirps up, "For disintegrating platforms, I used the video memory of the Spectrum. It was the first machine I had with a bit mapped screen." We note that the Cold Room level is considerably easier than the previous one. "Oh, I didn't do the screens in order. No, I did the first screen first and then I think I made some attempt to sort the rest out and give a graduated gameplay. That's why the first screen is disproportionately hard, because it wasn't part of that scheme."

THE MENAGERIE

Matt scans the collection of creatures on screen. "Here we've got spiders, emus, well, ducks or something. Yeah, they're flying! Well, their feet are coming off the ground. They're having a go! Hang on; there are only two kinds of animal in there. That's a bit lame. There should be at least three before you call it a menagerie!" Matt's French may be questionable, but we wonder if the birds do signify another sort of love, that of a man for his footy team? "Yeah, you could see it as a tribute to Liverpool FC. They're not far off being liver birds and I'm definitely a red shirt."

ABANDONED URANIUM WORKS

Matt denies this is a comment on the nuclear paranoia of the Eighties, though it did play on a very real fear. "It's a room full of difficult jumps and you have to go across it more than once. It was supposed to be scary, about testing your confidence." He starts to contemplate the nature of death. "Miner Willy is two characters high and if you fall four characters you're dead. Two, you're safe and three... hang on, was two deadly? Oh, I can't remember..." His memory works better when recalling how he coded Willy's famous leap. "The first two frames, you go four and four pixels, that's one whole character, then it's 3, 3, then 2, which makes eight pixels and another whole character. Then 2, 1, 1, 0, 0, -1, -1, -2, -2... it's a smooth curve rounded to the nearest integer." He grins and inhales deeply. And the performing seals? "Oh, I think that was because I had a six pixel rotating ball and thought, how am I going to make this into a character? I know, I'll stick a seal below it!"

EUGENE'S LAIR

So to the memorable snapping bogs of Level 5. "I was telling my little brother Anthony about the toilet monster that reaches up and grabs you. Yeah, he really believed there was a green monster that lived down there," chuckles Matt maliciously. Not a comment on fellow coder Eugene '*Wacky Waiters*' Evans' career going down the pan, then? "I'd met Eugene a few times. We were passing acquaintances. He'd hit the press before me and he played the media darling far more thoroughly than I did. Must have been jealousy, because he was working for the 'other' company, Imagine and I was still aligned with Bug-Byte when I was doing this. And they were buying flash cars first and writing good games second. Actually, I'd have got more trading in a smashed up sports car than I've had from any residuals." Are those gold bars Willy is collecting? "Nah, they're supposed to be stacks of credit cards. I had a choice of putting in a line to show they're stacked."

THE MAKING OF... MANIC MINER

PROCESSING PLANT

An obvious homage to the arcades of Matt's youth. "Yeah I used to play *Pac-Man* at the Unit 4 cinema in Wallasey." ("Don't look for it, it's not there any more" – *Spinal Tap*, ed). The addition of legs was a feeble attempt to avoid copyright infringement, perhaps? "Oh, I think we were all relying on the American 'Fair Use' provision, though thinking about it, that didn't actually exist in British law at the time. No, there were spare pixels free at the bottom. It had to be ten pixels wide to make it scroll smoothly and because it's round, it's got to be ten high, when everything else is 16, hence the legs." We note the level requires some tricky traversing along platforms with restricted headroom. "Yeah, I was designing routes by this time. I usually tried to get you to go across the screen as many times as possible, which makes things more interesting," cackles the evil genius.

THE VAT

Given Matt's on-off relationship with money over the years, we wonder if this is a reference to the Inland Revenue? "Nah, just a huge block of collapsing floors," he assures us. "Pure aesthetics really and no extra code needed. These collapsing floors were supposed to be one thing and I was seeing what else they could be. That's serendipity, that." And what of the kangaroo connection? He exhales and ponders for a while. "Erm, kangaroo meat? Dog food factory? Dunno… could be… random thoughts." With all the disintegration, it must have been an awkward screen to test? "With The Vat, I had my route and tested it over and over again. I didn't really know if there were any other routes. Some of these levels I've only ever done once, to this day. Same principle with the Banyan Tree in *Jet Set Willy*. There's no random numbers in the game. Every time you go into a level, you get the same start positions and speed, so if I can do it once then it's going to be a bit difficult for the good players." That's something of an understatement, Matt. "Quality control," he winks back.

MINER WILLY MEETS THE KONG BEAST

Another nod to the New Brighton arcades he frequented as a lad. "Barrels, bananas… I should have put hammers in and it would have been a complete tribute to *Donkey Kong*," he notes. It includes some testing jumps – "Yeah, some fives on this," Matt confirms, referring to the width of the gap in characters, "and they had to be pixel perfect." – and the first appearance of switches, though flipping both wasn't obligatory. "Maybe that was a mistake," muses Matt. "Maybe you were supposed to flick it to finish the level and I just completely forgot to test it." Then he has an epiphany. "Ah, no! The only violence in the game is completely optional! That's for if you feel a pathological compulsion to kill the Kong Beast. I think I was just being a hippy…" He adopts a 'Neil from *The Young Ones*' accent, which is not hugely different from his real voice. "You don't have to kill the monkey, man!"

WACKY AMOEBATRONS

"Yeah, a straight horizontal grid, innit," observes Matt of one of the game's more traditional levels. But are those bog brushes on wheels? "Ah, because your collisions with the sprites are pixel perfect, here I was testing what shapes you could clear. Willy was always 16 pixels high, but different widths at different points during a jump. I was testing the limits, so I made it as tall and thin as possible. I think I was going to make it go up and down so you could only jump over it at certain times, but then I worked out that even at the full height a sprite could be, you could still get over it if you timed it right – this was the level where I was finding that out." It's also the first level to undergo a change when *Manic Miner* was re-released through Software Projects. "Yeah, the amoebatrons were originally the Bug-Byte logo, so I changed them when I left. Didn't need any legal advice on that one!"

ENDORIAN FOREST

Those creatures look uncannily like Ewoks, Endor was their home planet and *Return Of The Jedi* was released the same year as *Manic Miner*. Let's take a wild guess and say you were a *Star Wars* fan, Matt. "I was that week! Went to see it, came home and stuck this screen in. Would I be a Jedi or Sith? Oh, Jedi! In fact, I put that on the last census as my religion." At this juncture we suggest a pause to replenish the Guinness and empty the ashtray as we're on screen ten and so halfway. "Nah, this is screen nine," Matt protests. We assure him we've reached double figures. "Oh, sorry. I always start counting from zero." You can't take the hex out of the boy...

RETURN OF THE ALIEN KONG BEAST

Alien because of the pulsating head we assume, Matt. He squints at the screen. "Yeah! It is going in and out!" Matt simulates the throbbing with his hands and this seems to trigger the memory of a little coding quirk. "I gave all the screens literal numbers, so like, if you were using one of those editors that came out, this screen would always have to have a Kong Beast in. Every screen had to share the same code – I couldn't do 20 different programmes – so I'd have flags and if it was one of those screens and another test was passed, whatever it was, Kong, Eugene or whatever, would go to the bottom of the screen and stay there." We watch Willy plunge to collect the final banana before landing safely in the exit. "Do you have to get there before Kong does? No? Oh, I suppose I was playing with you a bit with that," grins Matt.

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT TELEPHONES

The title is a reference to fellow coder, Jeff Minter. "I met Jeff a few times, when we won Golden Joysticks. We got on alright. Talked about music and stuff." We recall you said you liked this screen during your appearance on Iain Lee's TV documentary *Thumb Candy*. "Those phones are probably my favourite. Do you wanna see a photo of the actual phone they were modelled on? A BT 300 series." Matt goes upstairs but returns empty-handed. Quite a busy screen, this. Was there a limit to the number of enemies you could include? "Yeah, four going up and down and four going left and right. Hang on, I think you could change that to eight going up and down or left and right. I think I did that on certain screens. The Skylab Landing Bay... But yeah, eight was the limit. Due to memory. And speed. There's only so much you can draw before everything slows down. So make eight a constant and you don't have to worry about it!"

ORE REFINERY

"Are those lumps of ore? Probably," says Matt. "And you'd imagine a skull and crossbones not to be the target, but it is!" Despite Willy holding one over his shoulder on the cover of the second edition of the game, this level has one of only two ladders that appear in the game. It also has a lovely blinking eye. Any significance, Matt? "Oh ore!" he cries, cryptically. We admire Willy's well-timed, 'no going back' dash to the exit. "Oh yeah, you could've played for ages and get it wrong with that. Ha! I'd draw the platforms on graph paper and put arrows in where... No, no I didn't," he says, correcting himself. "I didn't use graph paper for *Manic Miner*. I wrote an editor on the Tandy for it. I wasn't using graph paper for level design, I was painting them in and playtesting them. I'd do a bit and see if it was possible to get past that. Then I'd add the next bit." And so his masterpiece evolved...

THE MAKING OF...
MANIC MINER

SKYLAB LANDING BAY

This level was always our undoing. The random falling objects instilled such panic in our young fingers. "Nope, it's all in a set sequence," Matt explains. "If you tape record this screen, it should be the same on every version. You can learn the pattern." His mind moves on to higher things. "Skylab was launched the year before and it crashed and burned... for the usual reasons. I don't know what they're going to do with the international space station when they can't afford to refuel it. I reckon they'll send it off into a higher parking orbit when they're finished with it... too big to crash and burn." Erm, and the keys on this screen? "Oh, they're computer chips." I notice Matt's fingers are twitching and then he starts making plinky plonky noises, while indulging in some inspired 'air gaming.' He still loves his baby...

THE BANK

We both smile at the rubber cheque on this screen. "Oh, cheques bounce," says Matt, ruefully. The ladders are back, too. "Yeah, that's a trellis. Left and right are the same character. I think you could only use eight different characters on each screen. Or was it four? *Jet Set Willy* was four, I think. That was even more primitive in some ways. The keys were stored separately. Were they? I can't remember. No, no they weren't. You could have a room full of 'em. The ladder was made from reusing a trellis character. There's no flipping in this – the line has to be up the middle. If they're flipped, they have to be stored twice in memory. You bit flip it and it's a completely different number. Flipping is an expensive operation on the Spectrum. Well, horizontal flipping is. Vertical is okay. That's just a memory location." We nod and hope you coders followed all that.

SIXTEENTH CAVERN

"I'd run out of names. Or maybe I was thinking in hexadecimal and thought it didn't need one," says Matt. And what are those enemies? "Flag bugs! In the code. If flag bug equals..." He thinks for a while. "Did they do anything special? No? Perhaps they were meant to. The graphics weren't saved as files, it was done by numbers. I was putting it into video memory. I laid out the levels using the editor but I was doing the graphics on graph paper. I didn't have BOUGIE (Byte Orientated Universal Graphics Interactive Editor) then. A thing I wrote that let me run through four frames of animation, forwards or backwards. Skylab is an exception. They have eight frames for the explosion, but the normal was four." And the keys? "That was an attempt at credit cards," he says. We note the need of collecting the key nearest the exit last, lest poor Willy is trapped with a depleting air supply. "It's not good to have tricks like that. Sometimes you can't resist it," he beams.

THE WAREHOUSE

"This was another experiment that I thought was so impossibly hard it would do nicely as a killer... a boss level!" he explains with a malevolent cackle. "I only ever completed this once [Pedants note, last time we met he confessed to never having completed it]. "Now I've had more practice maybe I could do it in half a dozen goes. With moving things and collapsing floors it's very hard to measure whether something is possible. Because everything is pre-determined, if it's possible once, it's possible for everyone. That's the only way you can really know that you're not on a bum steer." The lawn mower threshers on this level changed into the Software Projects 'Impossible Triangle' logo at the same time the Bug-Bytes were ditched. Or at least, that was the plan...

AMOEBATRONS' REVENGE

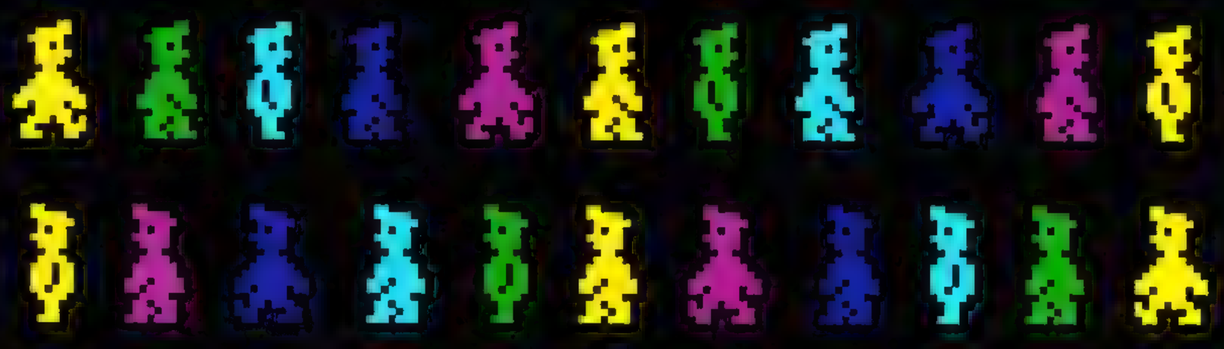
The tentacles are back in a reprise of Level 9, though they now seem to resemble the invaders from *War Of The Worlds*. "I thought they were jellyfish but yeah, maybe they have evolved into a higher life form," muses Matt. The difficulty has also grown. "This screen has all the different speeds the enemies can move at, up to four pixels a frame. I did the same sort of thing in *Jet Set Willy* for the Kitchen, but split it over two screens."

THE FINAL BARRIER

We're almost home. And with the sun setting romantically over the lake, it never looked sweeter. "Yeah, I'm playing around with colour clash here. The graphics are sort of better. I had more freedom because there wasn't any interaction. If you're on screen 20, put the title screen graphics on the top half and you don't have to worry about 'em. I did do this screen on graph paper, then cut it up into characters and worked it out in hex in my head. No art packages or scanners back then!" Is that a lucky horseshoe signifying the final exit? "Nah, it's omega – the end!" And the fish and dagger that rewarded the heroic few? "Oh, just things I'd drawn that were only eight pixels high and 16 across and I hadn't used in the game," he says casually. But Matt, at the Screenplay Festival a few years back, and admittedly after a few beers, you went on about its religious connotations, that it was your attempt to give gaming a "little bit of folklore"? He takes one last drag of his roll-up. "It might have," he smiles. "You'll find out in my next broadcast..." Ah, if only...

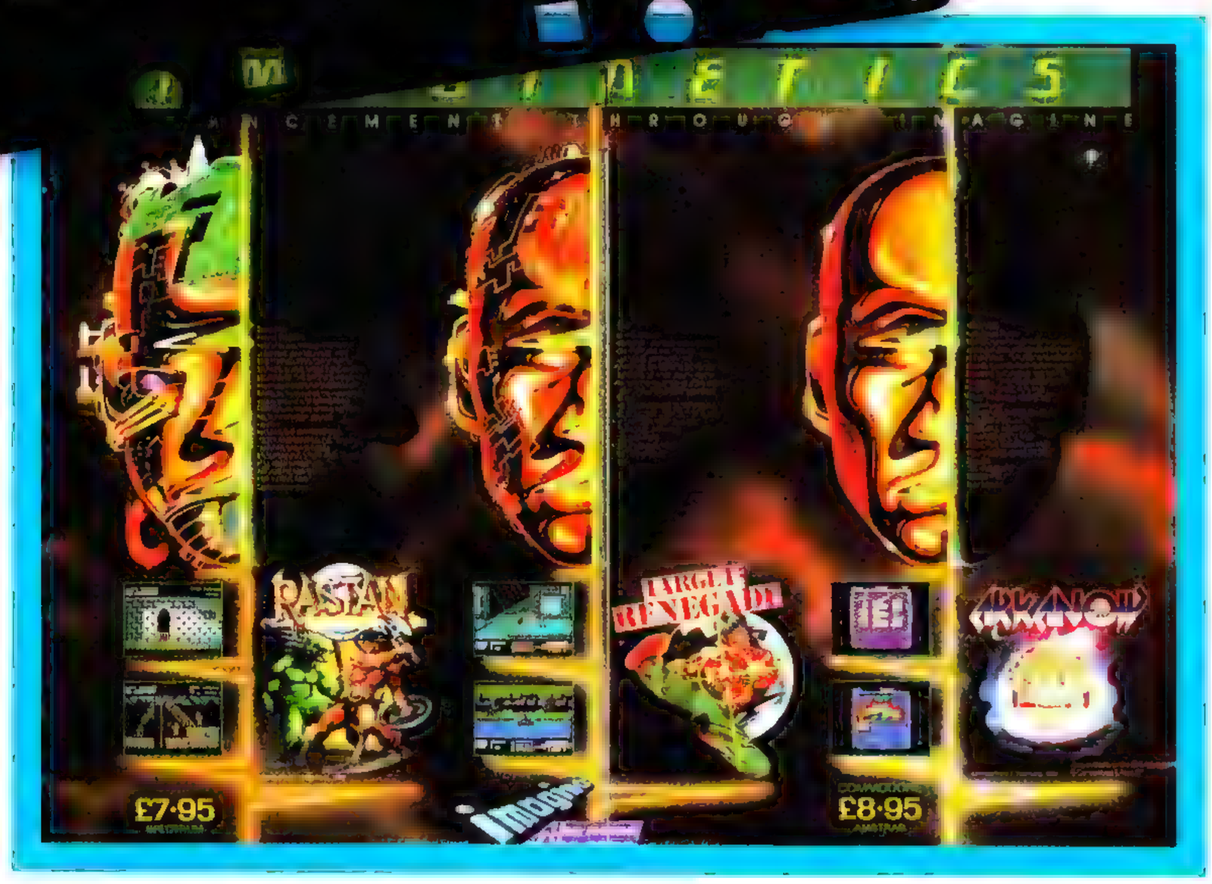
SOLAR POWER GENERATOR

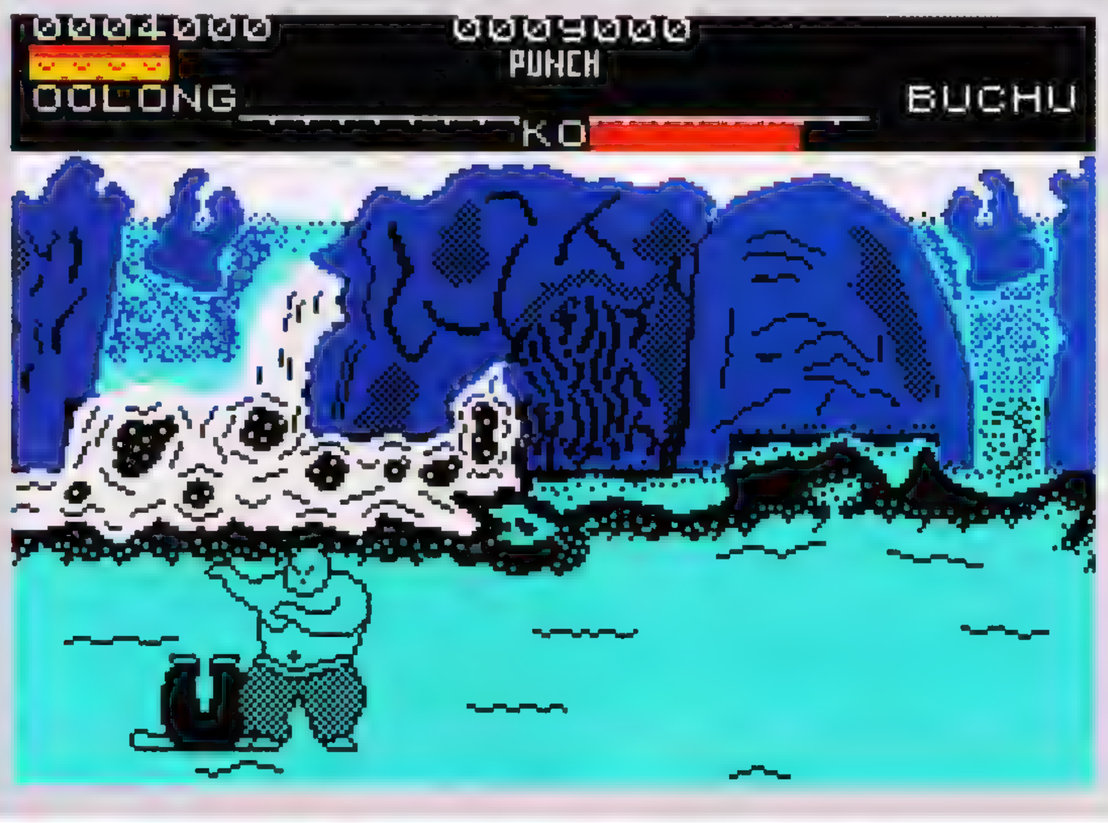
Was this a sign of your growing environmental awareness then, Matt? He has a wild, far-off look in his eye. "No more than any other rational person. I'm worried about the environment, man..." he answers in that Neil voice. "I think this is one of the brightest backgrounds. Up till now, I think I'd only done one of the four dark colours. Mainly black." Nice solar-ray effect. Was it tricky to create? "Ooh, highly technical," he laughs. "Nah, just a little bit of code. Easy enough to program. One character wide, go down and if it hits something, go that way – always at a right angle. The Spectrum can only do right angles in colour. Get it bouncing around. They'd call it artificial intelligence now. Doesn't kill you but it sucks your air down when you're in the beam. It's sort of complicated and you do run out of air, but it's not a particularly hard level." We can't be the only ones to strongly disagree...



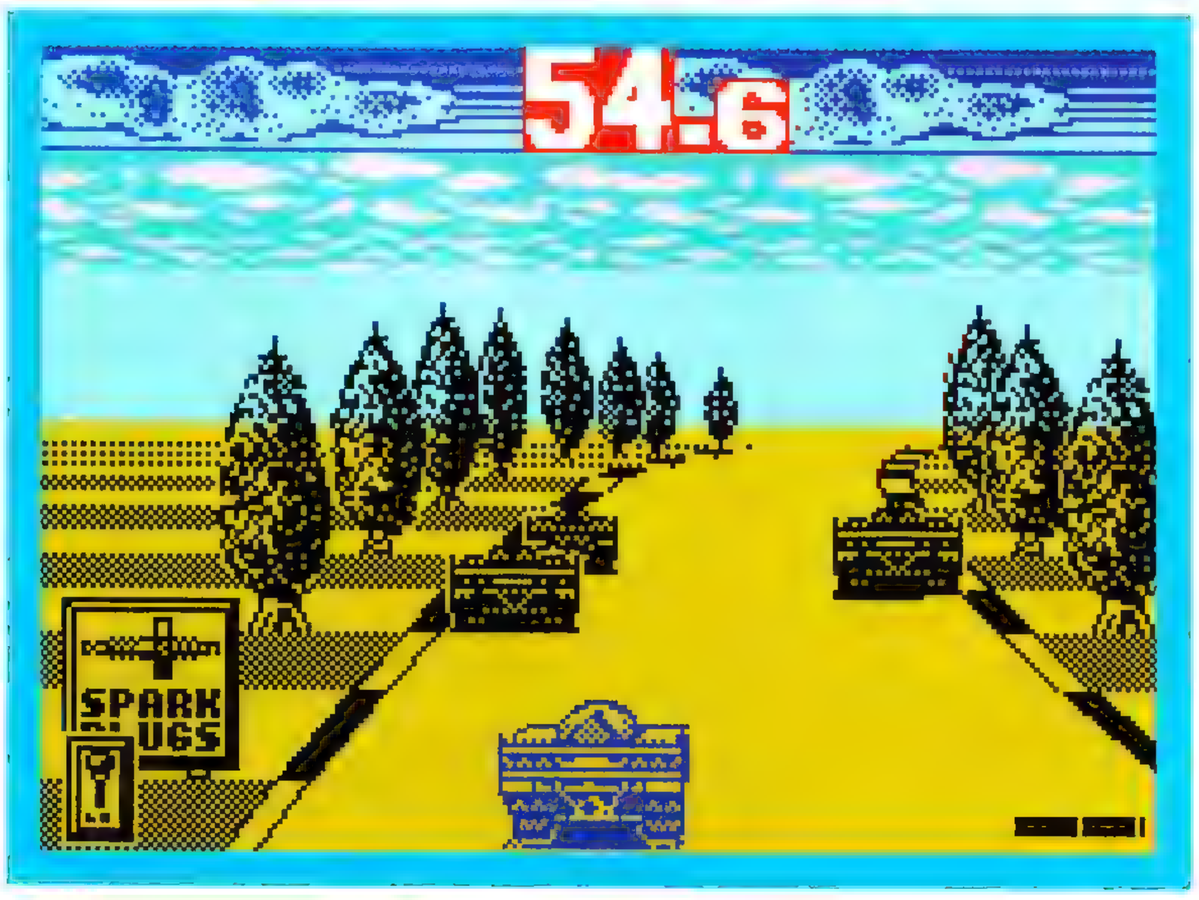
COMPANY PROFILE

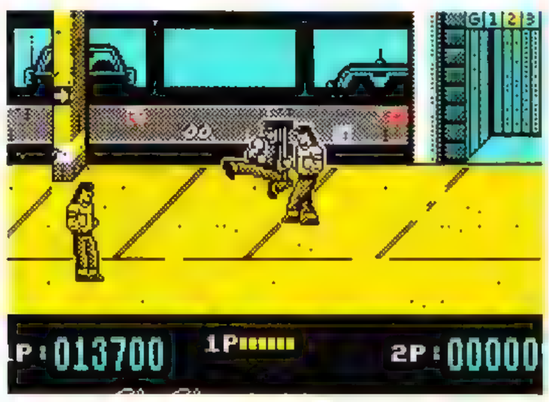
IMAGINE SOFTWARE

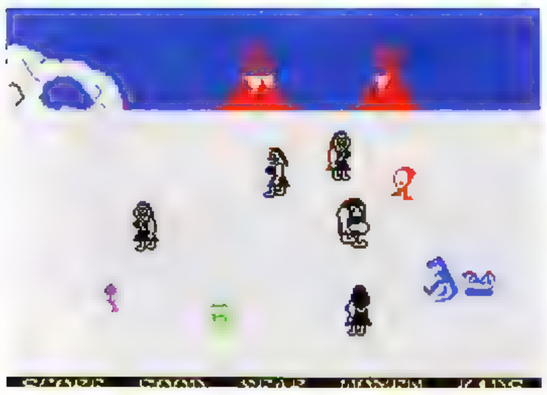




A FAIRY TALE BEGINNING THAT ALL ENDED IN TEARS. WHO COULD HAVE IMAGINED IT?







Among the whiz-kid software houses from the halcyon days of 8-bit home computing was the popular Spectrum developer Imagine Software. It lived fast and died young, spectacularly going bust right in front of a BBC TV film crew. Humble beginnings, pioneering, often ambitious computer games, debonair lifestyles and a dramatic climax, Imagine Software did it all inside of just 18 very short months

Mark Butler (a salesman) and Dave Lawson (a programmer) met at the increasingly successful Liverpudlian software company Bug Byte, which also nurtured the talents of Manic Miner creator Matthew Smith. Not long after beginning their tenure, a divergence from managerial policy prompted the pair to leave Bug Byte and start their own software house known as Imagine.

Lawson had already put together a game that would be used as Imagine's launch title: an addictive space-based shooter for the Spectrum 16K and Commodore Vic 20 that was entitled Arcadia.

With the proceeds from the outstanding success of Arcadia and the subsequent Spectrum titles making headway on the good Imagine name, earnings rapidly skyrocketed, prompting the new industry hot-shots to relocate into professional premises, whilst taking on staff and pouring funding into new projects. Their former boss, Bruce Everiss was brought in as a general manager, allowing Lawson and Butler the time to indulge themselves in the flamboyant, playboy lifestyles they had been building towards.

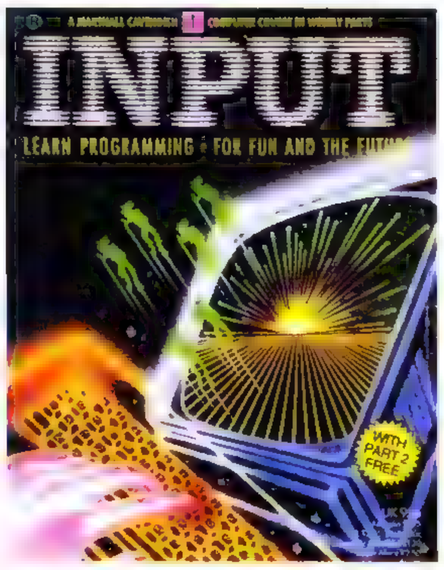
Back in the early days, many were the software developers that easily entered the market due to their technical expertise, but quickly suffered from a lack of business and marketing proficiency; not unlike the tornado of 'dot com' companies in recent years. Imagine, however, did not struggle with the task of spreading its good word, and deftly, if occasionally unscrupulously, played the media game to win.

A teenage employee who had proven himself as somewhat of a programming prodigy had taken an in-house job at Imagine and was the subject of an ingenious marketing ploy to increase the public profile of his impetuous employers.

His name was Eugene Evans, and 'somehow' the tabloids got hold of his remarkable success story.

The Daily Star carried the headline '£35,000 WHIZ KID'; referring to rumours that Evans was on such a salary at Imagine when only 16-years-old. It was suggested that he already owned a flashy sports car despite being too young to drive it. This entire media buzz was a ruse that was designed to improve Imagine's standing in the software developers' community and ease any concerns that distributors might have about dealing with such fledgling programmers.

And its unconventional marketing strategies didn't stop there. After the gaping void in the availability of computer games in 1982, developers were bustling and ready for the following holiday season. 1983 was set to see the most savage competition the UK games market had ever seen, and Imagine was determined to come out of it smelling of green.



IN (PUT) FLAGRANTE

Another potentially lucrative deal with publishers Marshall Cavendish also caused perturbing chest pains for the increasingly troubled company. Imagine had taken a £200,000 advance for supplying games to accompany its new computer-based partworks publication, Input.

The deal was for fortnightly multi-format cover tapes containing computer games, but Imagine was late in delivering the reportedly substandard goods. Marshall Cavendish demanded that its advance payment be returned, which left a gaping hole in Imagine's already Swiss-cheese finances. A statement by Imagine in Sinclair User stated that Marshall Cavendish had requested 'average' games, while the ones supplied were just too good, so the deal was called off!

In brief: Retro Gamer recounts the playboy lifestyle of the ill-fated, dynamic, renowned Liverpool software house, Imagine, and its spectacular collapse right in front of a TV film crew. Formed by Mark Butler and Dave Lawson (above), Imagine appeared to have it all. As time progressed, the arrogance and extravagant lifestyles of its two co-founders cost the company dearly and it eventually closed its doors within two years of the company forming. Its story remains a valuable lesson for software companies the world over.

IMAGINE SOFTWARE

NOT SO JOLLY

In an attempt to reduce its burdens, marketing rights to Imagine's back catalogue were sold to London based publishers, Beau Jolly, which then distributed the newly acquired titles through Mastertronic's budget range and in compilations. In an interview for Crash magazine, Beau Jolly's Managing Director, Colin Ashby, admitted to not being very happy with deal.

He was also under the impression that the agreement included investment in new developments, most notably, the mega games.

Dave Lawson and Ian Hetherington had been putting together a lifeboat for themselves in the shape of a new company called Finchspeed, however, that was concentrating on completing the mega games and putting them out for the forthcoming Sinclair QL computer. These were developments insinuated to be part of Imagine's resuscitation deal with Beau Jolly, but apparently that was never the intention

One of the compilations Beau Jolly managed to release after buying up some failing Imagine property

» It might be ostentatious, but the golden Alchemist tape is a collectors dream.

MEGA GAMES, MEGA PROBLEMS

In an unprincipled attempt to stymie rival developers in the run up to Christmas '83, Imagine booked up all the cassette **duplication** time at Kiltdale, the largest tape duplicator for the software industry at the time. Since games stayed in development right up until the eleventh hour, it would be impossible for Imagine's rivals to make the Christmas rush. This was an ingenious idea that hinged on one minor point: for the conspiracy to pay off, Imagine had to achieve unprecedented sales during, and after, Christmas 1983. This was just in time for the global software industry to begin crumbling, and Imagine was forced to hire an entire warehouse to store all its unsold cassettes.

Whether or not Imagine's ploy to ground rival house's duplication requirements was successful is difficult to say. The boom was far greater than expected, with literally hundreds of different software titles flooding the shelves, causing serious concerns that despite the massive sales figures, profit was spread so thinly that many software developers were unlikely to survive the winter.

By the time the Imagine team was established and the plush offices stocked from floor to ceiling with the highest of high-tech, it was time for the Lawson and Butler Show to begin work on the masterpiece they had envisioned from day one. They believed that the limits of the cassette-based systems had been reached, and the only way forward was in the shape of their 'mega game' concept. The launch titles, *Psyclapse* and *Bandersnatch*, would be vastly superior games to anything that had come before as they would be supported by additional hardware packaged with the game.

On average, an 8-bit computer game at the time cost around £7, while the mega games were set to retail between £30 and £40, assuming Imagine could afford to order the massive quantities from the Far East required to get the manufacturing costs down. Coupled with the extended software development times and additional manpower necessary to get the two proposed projects off the ground, the software hot shots were going to need some serious financing.

> "BY THE TIME THE IMAGINE TEAM WAS ESTABLISHED AND THE PLUSH OFFICES STOCKED FROM FLOOR TO CEILING WITH THE HIGHEST OF HIGH-TECH, IT WAS TIME FOR THE LAWSON AND BUTLER SHOW TO BEGIN WORK ON THE MASTERPIECE THEY HAD ENVISIONED SINCE DAY ONE"

In 1983, the BBC began filming a series of programmes called 'Commercial Breaks', the new documentary was to follow the trials and tribulations faced by various companies and individuals that were trying to introduce new products to the high street. One of the BBC's concepts was to closely examine the burgeoning software industry, and Imagine was picked out as suitable candidates for the cameras to stalk.

At first, Imagine's management team were more than a little reluctant to allow the film crew into their studio, saying there were far too many sensitive projects under development to allow filming. However, once it was discovered that Ocean was also taking part in the program, Imagine's vanity won through and it agreed to take part. Dave Lawson saw it as the opportunity to record the birth of the next-generation of computer games for posterity, and indeed it would capture a unique event in the life of the British software industry, though it was not quite the one Lawson might have hoped for.

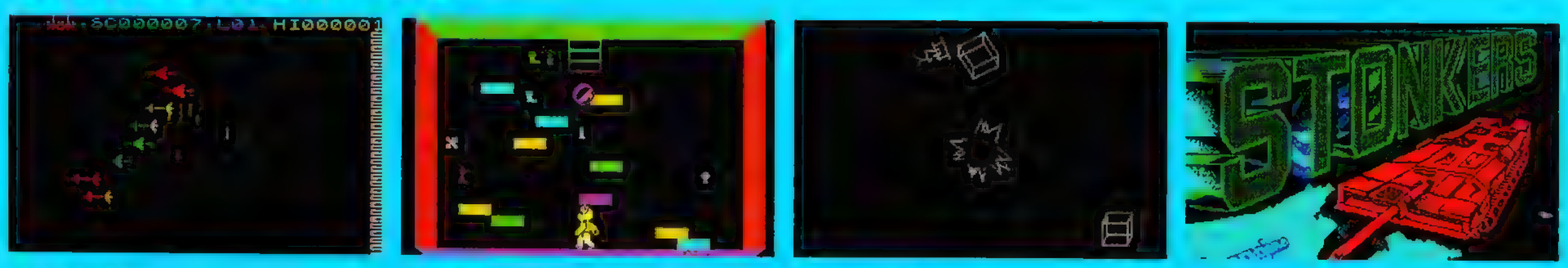
FINANCIAL ALCHEMY

Imagine's tape replication ploy certainly didn't pan out as it had hoped and the thousands upon thousands of extra copies it had ordered to deliberately congest the duplicators now had to be shelved – and money was rapidly running out.

Imagine was already beginning to topple behind the scenes, even while the BBC camera crew was being installed and opening shots of plush offices swollen with expensive hardware and management arriving for work in lavish cars were being filmed. An incident included in the BBC2 program showed a board meeting discussing the slow progress of the mega games and ways to keep the distributors on side with teaser advertisements, when an eagerly anticipated phone call is snatched up by the apprehensive Financial Director.

He had apparently been waiting for a call regarding the £2 million investment capital needed to move the over-hyped mega games forward. The sunken look on his face as he dropped the receiver back onto the phone

GAMES REVIEWS



ARCADIA

ALL DESIGNS

SCHIZOIDS

STONKERS

FINEST HOUR

ALCHEMIST

An enthralling blend of action, adventure and role-playing that not only captured the... well, imagination of the players, but provided an inspiring showcase of the Spectrum's abilities for the generations that followed. A special edition ostentatious 'gold' cassette was even released, which is well worth hunting down on eBay.

gave a clear indication to everyone as to the nature of the call, and as the meeting drew to a close, he stressed that no more financial commitments were to be placed without his express permission.

Up until this point, the film had concentrated on Imagine's impressive vision and doubly impressive public profile, reiterating the tabloid stories of millionaire teenager programmers and presenting action scenes of the Imagine motorbike team speeding around the Isle of Man. The sudden and unexpected change of direction depicting the company as a brave face on an extremely tenuous situation perfectly exemplified its shifting fortunes.

The meeting scene was interspersed with views of a representative from Kiltdale, the cassette duplicators Imagine had booked up for the Christmas period, anxiously pacing the lush carpet in reception, waiting to collect the £50,000 owed for the stranglehold ploy…

THE MEGA-GAME'S UP

As its difficulties compounded, Imagine suddenly caused an uproar by drastically reducing the retail price of all their games, including new releases, to £3.95; meaning that many retailers who were still holding vast unused stocks of Imagine titles were going to lose a considerable investment. The official line on the price drop was that Imagine was enjoying such success that it was able to return some of its profits to its loyal customers, when in fact it was desperate to shift as much of its inactive inventory as possible to pay off some of its escalating debts.

What Imagine wasn't prepared for was the abrupt and very public admonishment from across the industry. Other software houses immediately put out statements insisting they would not be following suit as the new Imagine price tag was unrealistic and could only lead to second-rate products, while the Guild of Software Houses told the press that the move was potentially damaging to the industry. Imagine only took notice when threats from high street retailers to cease stocking its products forced the desperate developers to about turn on its price revision only two weeks after the initial announcement; which cost an equal amount of credibility as it did quick sales.

In retrospect, this drastic marketing tactic was the death knell for Imagine.

One magazines that had carried a lot of Imagine's adverts was Crash, which, whilst remaining truthful, pulled no punches in reporting the goings on that lead to its outstanding payments, reportedly receiving more than a couple of warnings not to print anything pejorative. Naturally, those warnings were included in Crash's reports!

Neither Crash, Kiltdale nor any of the other creditors owed money had any success in contacting the upper echelons of Imagine other than a very despondent, antagonised Bruce Everiss, who was not a signatory and therefore unable to write any cheques. He was quoted in a Crash article as saying that he had looked through the company's finance records when the directors had disappeared and found there had never been a VAT return or any kind of financial control at all. His final appearance on the BBC2 documentary is of him showing the crew around an inactive, almost ransacked office where workers were watching 'American Werewolf in London' or having fire extinguisher fights to pass the time. According to his Crash interview, "…the company is up shit street."

Then, right in front of the BBC cameras, matters came to a head. Dave Lawson and Ian Hetherington (the Financial Director) abruptly left for America seeking venture capital to save Imagine (although it was more likely a trip to hunt for investors for their new enterprise, Finchspeed) when Cornhill Publications and VNU Business Press simultaneously petitioned the High Court to have Imagine wound up for non-payment of debts. These petitions went unopposed, and as the BBC camera crew and several Imagine staff returned from their lunch on 29 June 1984, they found the doors to the company locked as agents of the bailiff moved in. The BBC even had difficulty reclaiming two of the cameras that were inside when the company was occupied.

Mark Butler returned from racing his Imagine sponsored motorbike around the TT races covered in bandages after (rather ironically) crashing at the exact same time as his company collapsed, watching stunned and distraught as his beloved Ferrari was loaded onto the back of the repo-man's lorry.

In less than two years of trading, the whirlwind life of the Imagine software house came to a dramatic and spectacular end.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

The banner of Imagine, along with much of its workforce, was resurrected by David Ward of Ocean when he bought the name and much of the equipment from the liquidators.

Despite its self-inflicted quandaries, Imagine will be remembered for providing some truly spectacular titles in its short lifespan, rather than the unfortunate happenings that surrounded its existence.

The label, and much of the talent that was fostered, went on to enjoy prolific careers, ensuring that Imagine's legacy would be more than just scandal, avarice and misfortune.

BAD REP

The mounting uncertainty of the mega game's future was depicted by a brief outing with Imagine's sales rep in the BBC2 *Commercial Breaks* program, as she met with an apprehensive distributor regarding a vast quantity of unsold games. In true Imagine style, rather than tackle the problems at hand, she brushed them aside to concentrate on pushing the next big sale: the mega game she had apparently been promising the distributor for some time. Her abortive attempts to explain the revolutionary aspects of these new titles – that she had never even seen – clearly put the distributor on edge, particularly when she let slip that the cost would be nearly seven times that of the average computer game. He was polite for the cameras, but noticeably kept her at arms length.

ALCHEMIST

IMAGINE (1983)

» *Alchemist* was undoubtedly Imagine's crowning achievement. In an attempt to destroy an evil warlock, the Alchemist must piece together a scroll that contains the spell of destruction. His deft use of metamorphosis and spell casting allowed him to take on his enemies threatening domain
Large, well-animated sprites and terrific backdrops made Alchemist a true slice of fried gold. **90%**

BC BILL

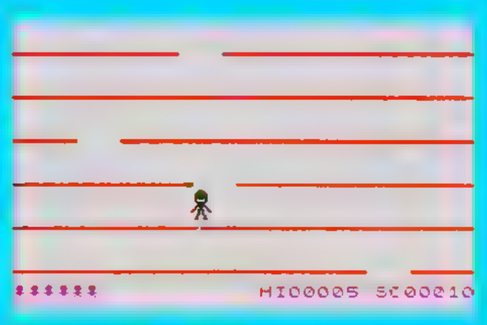
IMAGINE (1984)

» *BC Bill* smacked of a game hacked together during the death throes of the company. The caveman wandered about the single screen coshing prospective cave-wives over the head and dragging them back to his cave for some Palaeolithic pleasures. Kids then started appearing to provide food for the passing dinosaurs and antagonism for the hirsute Neanderthal. The Flintstones was never this boring. **50%**

MOLAR MAUL

IMAGINE (1983)

» A more enjoyable game than it deserved to be, probably due to being laced with the outrageously imaginative gameplay and rakish humour the Imagine team was imbued with.
As a toothbrush, you had to patrol the inside of a mouth fighting off the evil DK's as they attempt to ruin the enamel. Unusual, and not a little bit icky, Molar Maul just managed to tip the scale towards success. **60%**



JUMPING JACK

IMAGINE (1983)

» A game that wouldn't look out of place on a Atari 2600, this was a very basic, yet strangely addictive idea that almost certainly started life as a Donkey Kong clone.
The basic graphics left all the enjoyment down to gameplay, which involved ascending the levels by jumping through holes as they pass above Jack's head.
Enjoyable, but not one of Imagine's better titles. **66%**

AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

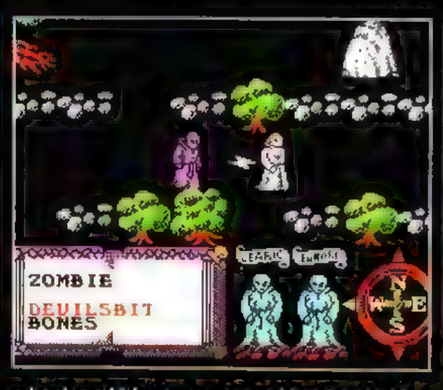
BC BILL

Quite clearly, the fate of Imagine was known to the despondent staff as they casually threw together an unfitting epitaph that would have been a rubbish handheld LCD game, never mind a waste of valuable cassette tape.

THE CLASSIC GAME

FEUD

Flower-picking, warring wizards and devastating incantations. Retro Gamer grabs its spell book, heads for the herb gardens and prepares for a battle to the death.



» Look out! it's your wayward brother. He'll fling spells at you if you dawdle, so move away as quickly as possible.

Sometimes it's possible to spot a classic game from a mile off. Often critically acclaimed and filled with incredibly innovative ideas that practically jump out at you, its pedigree is there for all to see and admire and you can usually guarantee that it'll be popping up in classic polls several years down the line. Other times though, despite initial high praise, a game can sometimes slip below the radar, only to be lost to all but the most ardent of gamers. The Pickford brothers' *Feud* is one such game.

Often jokingly referred to by the Pickford brothers – Jon created the original design, while Ste worked on the visuals – as 'gaming's first deathmatch against a computer opponent', *Feud* remains a refreshingly enjoyable romp that has weathered the last 20 years exceptionally well and shows no sign of getting stale. It also came up with the idea of featuring sibling rivalry in a videogame long before Kojima got in on the act with *Metal Gear Solid*'s Liquid and Solid Snake.

Unlike Kojima's siblings, the Pickfords' creations didn't have hi-tech weaponry, advanced combat training or computer skills to rely on; they simply resorted to good old-fashioned spellcraft to solve their problems. For you see, Learic and Leanoric were two rival warlocks with a hatred for each other that was so great even Noel and Liam Gallagher would blush.

Feud begins when the two warring brothers are at the end of their tethers, and finally realise that they're never going to be able to get along with each other. Therefore they decide that the only way to solve the issue is by competing in one last fight. This time though, instead of turning each other into animals or taking out their anger on the simple villagers they decide to fling spells until the vanquished brother is resting in the cold hard ground.

And thus begins one of the tensest gaming experiences ever created for an 8-bit micro (or 16-bit if you were lucky enough to own the Amiga version). What's interesting about *Feud* is that while the two brothers had a variety of deadly spells at their disposal, they couldn't actually use them until they had acquired the correct ingredients (each of the 12 spells required two components). Therefore the early stages of *Feud* had you frantically searching the countryside for suitable herbs and roots that could be used to create the many potent spells

» Dozy villagers will often annoy you by getting in your way. Get revenge by turning them into zombies.

IN THE KNOW

PUBLISHER: BULLDOG (MASTERTRONIC)
DEVELOPER: BINARY DESIGN
RELEASED: 1987
GENRE: ACTION ADVENTURE
EXPECT TO PAY: A FEW QUID

» The two figures to the right of your spellbook depict the current health of each wizard.

» There are a wide variety of spells to be used in the game. Some will help you, but many will damage your opponent.

» You've found the Dragonsteeth, now all you need is the Mousetail and you can make your fireball.

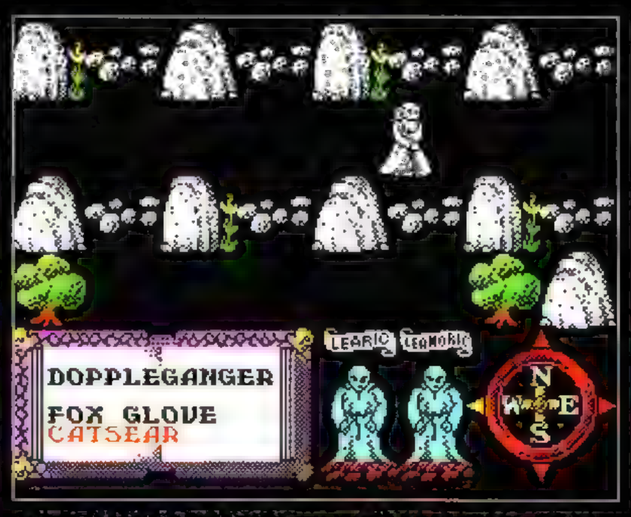
that were needed to defeat your evil brother Leanoric. Of course, gathering these resources was far from easy, mainly because the countryside the two brothers lived in was spread across 90 beautifully drawn screens and filled with some seriously devilish mazes to negotiate. Indeed, your first few plays normally ended with frustration, as you constantly found yourself walking into dead ends, a herb often lying just out of reach. Once you'd figured out *Feud*'s clever layout however, progress became far easier and allowed you to focus on your next objective – staying out of your brother's way until you were ready to actually deal with the bugger.

And this is where the beauty of *Feud* truly shines – at least on the Amstrad and Spectrum versions – because while you were trying to gather plants like Cud Weed and Knap Weed (they make great lightning bolts don't you know) your brother was doing exactly the same thing. Yes *Feud* looked the biz with its bold cartoony visuals and stirring soundtrack, but what made the Pickfords' creation truly stand apart from other titles of the time was the fact that your brother Leanoric came across as a living, breathing player. This was no mean feat when you consider the limitations of the hardware. Therefore, while you were busy planning strategies and working your way through the mazelike countryside, your brother was doing exactly the same thing.

Fortunately a compass in the bottom-right corner of the screen would point out your brother's position in the game world, so you generally had a good idea where the devious warlock would be hiding. Sooner or later though the need to reach certain locations – the herb garden for example featured a variety of useful herbs – in order to complete specific spells meant that the two rivals would eventually run into each other. And woe betide the foolish wizard who entered a battle with no spells available...

Fireballs, sprites and the aforementioned lightning bolts were just a few of the deadly offensive spells that both skilled wizards had access to and a successful hit with them considerably drained your energy (depicted by two on-screen wizards who would slowly sink into the ground). Freeze spells held your opponent in place, hopefully allowing you to use more dangerous incantations, while spells like Doppelganger, Protect and Invisible granted you with ways of deflecting Leanoric's continued attacks. What's interesting is that the more dangerous spells were often a lot harder to acquire, so *Feud* actually required a fair amount of strategy in order to defeat your annoying sibling. Did you simply keep close to home, (you have to return to your hut and a huge cauldron in order to create spells) or did you stray further afield and risk stumbling into your brother and a potentially fearsome arsenal of spells? It's an interesting dilemma that worked perfectly, unless you owned a C64 (see boxout). In fact, it worked so well that the brothers are now promising an update, although their website does stress that its format will be a little different to what we've grown so accustomed to. Still, if it's half as good as the 1987 original we'll be first in line to buy it.

IT WORKED SO WELL THAT THE BROTHERS ARE NOW PROMISING AN UPDATE, ALTHOUGH THEIR WEBSITE DOES STRESS THAT ITS FORMAT WILL BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT TO WHAT WE'RE SO ACCUSTOMED TO



» He may look friendly but the owner of the herb garden will rob you of energy if you get too close to him.

PITY THE C64

Thanks to the introduction of the Pickford brothers' new website (www.zee-3.com) it's possible to find out why the C64 conversion was so different to the superior Amstrad and Spectrum outings.

"John wasn't on the *Feud* team, he was just the guy who had come up with the game design," begins Ste Pickford. "So the C64 coder choose to ignore him. He didn't get the idea that there was a properly designed map for the game, even though it didn't scroll smoothly like other C64 games. The map was split into screen-sized pages. He decided to ignore the layout data for each screen's objects, which I'd prepared, and plonked trees and bushes around randomly on each screen.

As he had no map stored in memory he was unable to use the AI code for the enemy wizard, which was the heart of the game. So on the C64 only Leanoric's position on screen was tracked, not his position on a map. Once he walked off screen he would appear back on screen again after a random delay.

And because of dodgy positioning, there were loads of sections where two screens didn't join up properly so you would walk into trees and walls as you flipped screens. Rubbish."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GLIDER RIDER
SYSTEMS: VARIUOS 8-BIT
YEAR: 1986

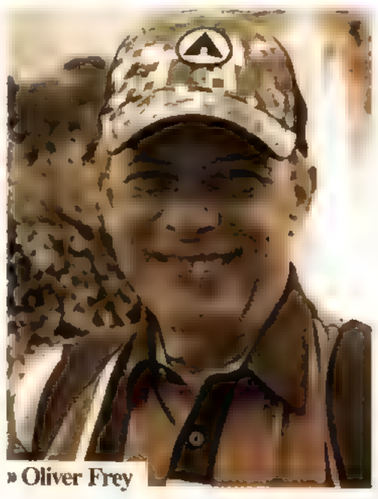
PLOK! (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1992

NAKED WAR
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 2006

Newsfield's Crash was unlike any other gaming magazine, and as a result it's built up a tremendous following over the last 28 years. Retro Gamer spoke to Oliver Frey, Roger Kean and Matthew Uffindell and discovered how a Ludlow-based David took on the London Goliaths

RG: So, guys, tell us a little bit about life before *Crash*...

Roger Kean: I was a film editor. I worked for the BBC, Thames Television, Granada and I'd also been doing graphics, because before I went to London Film School I'd been to the college of art. I got bored with painting, however, and thought films were much more exciting. In fact I met Oliver at the London Film School. We moved to Ludlow in 1980. I was still doing one week on one week off in London for a magazine company, but Oliver's brother Franco came up with this notion that Spectrum games, which you couldn't buy in the shops at that time, would become a big business and that we should start a mail order business. We started Crash: Micro Games Action in 1983 and began advertising in the likes of *Computer & Video Games*, *Your Sinclair* and *Computer Trade Weekly*. In turned into a decent business; nothing spectacular, but it kept us in mortgage payments. Anyway, a lot of kids from Ludlow school were reading these magazines and suddenly realised that somebody was selling these games in their sleepy little town and they suddenly began queuing at the door. Simultaneously we received a call from Wells Gardner & Darton. They had seen one of our funny little A4 printed catalogues and had sent it to WHSmith, who had said: 'Well, if there was a magazine like that we'd probably buy it.' That was where the idea for *Crash* started. It was supposed to come out in Christmas 1983, but there was a lot of trouble getting printers, prices and distribution set up, so the first issue was eventually released in January 1984.


» Oliver Frey

RG: So why just focus on the Spectrum and not machines like the C64?

RK: Well, the C64 wasn't particularly big then and the Spectrum seemed more accessible.

Oliver Frey: My brother felt that the Spectrum seemed to offer the most games at the time and that just fixating on one type of computer was better than focusing on more.

RK: The Spectrum seemed to be the one to go for and Sinclair had sold 2 million machines by then. We wanted to concentrate on one thing and do it well. It was also the machine that nearly all the Ludlow school kids had, which meant we immediately had this big pool of reviewers who were the target markets. That's what made *Crash* so unique in the first place. As it had three reviews for most games, but also that the average age of the reviewers was 14.

RG: So you mentioned that there were delays to the first issue. How long did you work on it in total?

RK: We started the issue in November and were very naive to think it would be out in December. We didn't really know the magazine trade very well, but yeah, we started in earnest in early November. Matthew Uffindell and myself really sat down and began putting the first reviews together with around eight or nine of the local school kids. They were given a tape and told to go away and come back the next day with an appraisal of what they thought of it.

RG: So was the management side something you handled yourself?

RK: Newsfield Ltd came to be at the end of 1983 and was myself, Oliver and his brother Franco and Matthew Uffindell and that was it.

OF: We three were the directors and Matthew was...

RK: He was a schoolboy, all right. A college boy.

OF: And the name Newsfield was an off-the-peg name. You could buy companies from certain places and there were ready-made names.

RK: This one was actually called Newsfield Ltd and we thought: 'This seems appropriate. Why change it?'

RG: So where did the name come from?

OF: It was an evening conversation over a meal with the three of us and we were trying to think of a name. I can't remember who it was – I think it was you, Roger – but you came up with the name *Crash*, which of course was a bad name for computers and somehow it sort of stuck. In the games context it sounds good.

RK: Yes, and it led to the fact that the next magazine would have been called *Bang* and the third *Wallop* [both laugh] but a certain Chris Anderson intervened on *Bang* and said: 'No way!'

RG: So why use youngsters to review these games as opposed to proper reviewers?

RK: It was literally a reaction against the likes of *C&VG*. Their reviews always seemed so serious for what they were dealing with. It just seemed stuffy, so we thought

we'd react against that and get the actual target market and see what they thought. Certainly in the first few years we really didn't interfere with what they thought, although we would interfere with their English. Some of them were very good. The likes of Robin Candy and Ben Stone were natural writers. Others, of course, could barely string two words together, but they had a good idea of what the game was.

» Roger Kean

RG: So because they were the target audiences for the games, you felt they had a better grasp of them.

RK: Absolutely. Also in time readers would learn to appreciate one person's review over another. The format carried over to *Zzap!*, but *Zzap!* was slightly different because they were employees as opposed to standard reviewers. But with *Crash* we always used the local pool as they came through. It also helped that employment law was far more lax than it is today. They were all properly on the books but if they were under 16 they didn't have to pay tax or anything like that, but everything was always handled correctly from a tax point of view. The great thing was that anyone could just come up to the door of *Crash* Towers and say: 'I want to be a reviewer,' and we could just go: 'Well, here's a game. Take it away and we'll see if you're any good.'

OF: A lot got turned away.

RK: And a lot got bored as well.

RG: The first issue apparently went on to sell around 50,000. Is that correct?

RK: Well that was estimated because Wells Gardner & Darton, the distributors, took the first issue and the second issue and went bankrupt, which was a disaster because it meant that we weren't going to get paid. We've only got estimates put together by COMAG, who had picked us up because we'd done so well and that was their estimate, which they thought was pretty astonishing.

RG: Is it true you got a letter from *C&VG* saying something like, 'Well done, lads'?

RK: I don't recall anything like that from *C&VG*, but we did get something similar from Dennis Publishing, who were launching *Your Spectrum*. In fact, they were just a bit behind us, but at the same time they regarded themselves as a very professional magazine. *Sinclair User*, on the other hand, referred to us as 'rural pirates' [laughs], which a few issues later they had good reason to reiterate.

RG: Which leads quite nicely into our next question. Did you think that the 'Unclear User' article would cause you so much trouble?

RK: [laughs] It depends. If Franco were here he'd be saying: 'I told them not to run it.' [more laughing] Graham Kidd came up with the concept, and as he was the chief at the time I ran with it because most of our kids were getting very angry at *Sinclair User* for one reason or another. Rightly or wrongly we ran with it. I remember saying to Franco, 'It's not really going to cause any trouble,' partly because we'd been having very friendly conversations with Bill who was the editor of *Sinclair User* at the time, with a view to poaching him. In fact he was virtually on board when this issue came out. He really had no alternative but to turn us down after that. It was a bit horrifying when we got an injunction thrown against us and we did lose a fair amount of money on that issue. It cost us £60,000 in apologies.

RG: Tell us about *Crash* during its heyday.

RK: At *Crash* Towers there were three floors – an art floor, editorial floor and production floor – and people were up and down them all the time. I'm sure that Markie [Mark Kendrick] will confirm that it had a very communal feel. We were really buoyed up by the magazine's success and when the figures came back – 106,000 something – there was just stunned silence from everyone. We leapt from something like 80,000 to 106,000 in a three-month period.

OF: We rose rapidly after the 'Unclear User' article.

RK: Yes, we even had support from various software houses. They were all pretty aghast that EMAP had taken action against Newsfield and I think we even received support via advertising revenue. Another aspect that gets overlooked about Newsfield was just how isolated we were. We were typing up our copy, marking it up, sorting out the font size and everything else, sending it to London, to typesetters, getting the galleys back with any spelling errors that we'd done and they'd done and it was costing us a lot of money. Early in 1984 we moved to using Apricot computers for text input and using a local printer and we were able to

» "Chairman Of The Board"

» A fine piece of Frey artwork, for which sadly only a large plate transparency exists now.

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 5

Death Star Trench

Inspired by the first *Star Wars* movie, this symbolised *Crash* magazine (white ship) being at the centre of the games action generated by ZX Spectrum software creators, their cassettes being the building blocks of the trench.

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 25

Mikie

Imagine's *Mikie*, about a school tearaway collecting hearts for his girlfriend, happened to coincide with Valentine's Day. A sweet effect was tempered by a stark white background and the action pose of Mikie.

bring our price down to about a third of the original cost. We began to expand very rapidly and were able to use graphics film planning to shoot the base pages on a process camera and put it all together, although we couldn't do the cover then. We started developing production people who would just work on the print side and we moved very quickly into full colour as well. Not scanning, but all the tints and coloured lettering and everything like that.

RG: You must have put some insane hours in initially.

RK: Yes, certainly the editorial people kind of worked all hours. *Crash* Towers was usually alight at midnight and into the early dawn. Production staff on the whole managed reasonable working hour days, although this would change as the mags went to print and they'd be working all hours as well.

» Matthew Uffindell

RG: Let's talk a little about *Crash*'s covers. Why did you decide to go with art covers?

OF: The thing is *Crash* was supposed to be all about the games and at the time most computer magazines had photos of equipment and it was all rather boring. And we thought: 'Games are just as exciting as the movies so let's treat the games with exciting pictures that you might see at the cinema.' The computers are only there to play the games on. That's my attitude.

RG: Where did the inspiration for most of the early covers come from, because they weren't always based on games...

OF: No, they weren't. To be fair, I have to give Roger credit as the editor, as he'd often come up to me and say: 'Can we do this?'

RK: The cover with *Sherlock Holmes* by Melbourne House was arguably the first one that was based on a game.

OF: The notion there was to have Sherlock Holmes with his big magnifying glass and reflected in it was the name of the game. It was just to make it look a little different. It's like the first cover of *Crash* with the alien playing *Space Invaders*; it's just a little joke.

RG: When you look at the covers now, many of them contain evocative, powerful imagery. Were you ever told that you couldn't put something on the cover?

OF: Well, the *Barbarian* cover certainly comes to mind. It had a barbarian gripping someone here [gesticulates] with a bloody great big sword and WHSmith put it on the top shelf because it was too bloody and violent.

RG: Do you think that sort of notoriety helped to sell the magazine?

OF: Well, my opinion is that boy readers like that sort of thing and it's the adults who don't want to look at covers that are thrilling and exciting and maybe slightly over the top.

RG: How long did the average cover take to put together?

RK: It varied, didn't it? *Crash* 1 took a long time.

OF: After that, though, it was always usually around three days max, because I had to keep up and do illustrations for the inside as well, so you couldn't be too precious. You had to work pretty damn quickly.

RG: So what's your favourite cover?

OF: Well actually my favourite is the original. I just thought it was the simplest and the cleverest. I just think it's funny to have an alien playing *Space Invaders* and it came out looking very powerful.

RK: We also wanted him to stare straight out at the audience, and this was something we wanted to do with all our covers. We wanted people to pick them up and think: 'They're staring at me.'

RG: What about yourself, Roger?

RK: I'd probably side with Oliver and say number 1. There were others that were really powerful. Another of my favourites was when the 128k model came out and we called the cover 'All-Singing, All-Dancing' and it had a curved keyboard with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers on it. I always thought that was a good one.

RG: So what about your least favourite?

OF: There was a mud wrestling one featuring Hannah Smith that I had to do that I really didn't like. In fact I was forced to do it because Graeme [Kidd] felt she deserved to be on the cover. I mean it was well painted and everything, but I just thought it was awful. Luckily she took it with her. If something's too cute I just don't like it.

RG: How much pressure did you get from publishers for their games to receive good scores?

RK: I certainly remember Franco being summoned up to see US Gold after trashing something that they saw as being precious. He said: 'Well, there's nothing I can do about that', and they just turned around and said, 'Well, we can pull advertising', to which he said, 'Well, yes you can'. They didn't in the end. We avoided a lot of the pressure, simply because it became the standard for software houses to actually come to Ludlow and show the games to the actual market.

RG: How did your excellent interview with Ultimate come about?

RK: I was astounded to get a phone call from Chris Stamper saying about how much he loved the magazine and I pushed my luck and decided to ask for an interview and the answer was no. Around about the third or fourth issue, however, they rang up and said that we could go and see them. I went with Robin Candy and spent all day at Twycross and it was amazing, because they were certainly one of the most sophisticated developers at the time and we were able to see all the new games that were coming up. I was allowed to take a couple of colour photographs of one or two of the games, but it was all quite sensitive, but in the end we had an excellent relationship with them. It was very hard not to, though, as every game they brought out just went straight to the top.

[It's at this moment that we're joined by Matthew Uffindell, who has travelled up to Ludlow at short notice to take part in the interview.]

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 20

Red Moon

The notion of summing up a game's feel with a simple, in-your-face, image: red moon, big monster, puny humans – this was a very popular cover.

» Newsfield's film planning room and workers, the forgotten boys of the back room who made it possible to produce up to four magazines a month.

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 32

Dan Dare

Pilot Of The Future **offered me a rare chance to draw one of my childhood heroes the way he appeared in the Fifties in *Eagle*, rather than the revamped Dare I'd had to draw in the early Eighties for IPC. It was great fun!**

» Rich Eddy and Robin Candy showing off the new Thalamus Games T-shirts before the launch of the software house. (1986)

Oli Online

If you're a fan of Oliver's powerful and evocative art, you may want to visit his brand new website. The Art of Oliver Frey features a selection of some of his greatest work from the past two decades and is an essential visit for anyone who's been impressed with his stunning imagery. This is also the first time that people have been able to buy original prints, so if there's a particular *Crash*, *Zzap!* or *Amtix* cover that you fell in love with back in the day, there's never been a better time to own the original and hang it on your wall for all to admire.

New art is being added all the time, and Oliver is also making it easy to see what has already been sold, so if you're looking for a specific piece of art and you can't find it, odds are it will be appearing online very, very soon. Visit www.oliverfreyart.com for more information.

RG: So, Matthew, how did you become involved with *Crash*?

Matthew Uffindell: It happened by accident, really. I heard that they were selling games on their doorstep and I thought: 'Well, I'll have a little wander down and see what it's all about.' I knocked on the door, we had a chat and I bought a game. I went back the following week and bought another game, and we had another chat and Roger said: 'Do you want to review some games?' So I did that, and then it was like, 'So, do you want a job?' and it just went on from there and we ended up reviewing thousands upon thousands of games.

RG: So what were the prices like for reviewing games?

MU: We did it really for the love of it. We got to play these games.

RK: Once we'd got into King's Street by issue 4 we started to put things on an official footing and I think we paid a fiver per review.

RG: That's actually pretty bloody good. We'd have had to wash about 20 cars to earn that sort of money back in the day.

RK: I definitely think they got reasonably paid for the work. But you're right: the first three or four issues were all about the love of being able to actually just play the game. That was mainly because everything was still so… amateurish? I guess that's the word you could use, but once we realised the magazine was going places we had to start getting serious in terms of management handling.

RG: What was it like working on *Crash* in the early issues?

MU: It was brilliant, actually, because instead of working it was like loving chocolates and working at a chocolate factory type of scenario. It was more of a family sort of environment and you'd be like: 'What's coming in today, Roger?' And you'd go and have a look at it and it was always exciting, especially when it was the Ultimate titles. We just played games to death really. It wasn't really work and it certainly wasn't a 9 till 5 job; it was just something I used to really enjoy doing. It was also cool the fact that you got to play games so long before your friends did.

RG: Did you have the relevant training before you took your position full time?

MU: Lots of it was passion and knowledge. I remember when *Space Invaders* came into the arcades, the first time I got to play *Pong*, so I had a good background of what was required to make things tick. Everyone was educated to a certain level. In fact I remember walking around and simply dictating to Roger.

RK: I'd be using a typewriter initially, typing away and Matthew would be walking around going, 'Hmmm, right…' [everyone laughs]

MU: It was very much like that and I'd just be pacing backwards and forwards spewing out all this stuff.

RG: What was it like grabbing screenshots? It was quite a convoluted process…

MU: Basically you had the camera and it was all about finding something that would whet the appetite for the game. You couldn't have a load of pictures on the page, so you just had to choose an image that would be of interest to the reader.

RK: Usually the photographs were taken in a second session in the sense that you'd normally play the game first and hopefully get to the end, although the timescale meant this wasn't always possible.

RG: So how long did you spend reviewing games on average?

MU: Well, you would always try to complete a game within the timescale. In fact I'd often take a game home at night and play through the night if need be, just because I loved to. My mum and dad would always moan. I remember one time when we were getting the Christmas special out you'd go in at like 7:00 in the morning and you'd then work through till four [in the morning] and then come in at 7:00 again the next day. You'd end up with a three-hour snooze, just because the magazines were stacked up over

CRASH

Old Faces

Nick Roberts:

Then: *Staff writer*

Now: *Business Development Manager*

How did you get your job on *Crash*?

I was a reader picking up his monthly copy for 95p when I discovered that the Playing Tips writer, Hannah Smith, was leaving. I sent in a letter to Roger Kean, on Alphacom 32 thermal paper printed out from my Spectrum, asking if I could take over. That piece of paper set me off on a career that has lasted 22 years as Roger took me on as an after-school reviewer.

What was it like on the magazine?

It was like being a member of an exclusive club, and very rock and roll. There was a great bunch of people around at the time – Robin Candy, Mike Dunn, Ben Stone, Julian Rignall… – and many of them are still big in publishing and videogames today. We used to have a great time at the PCW Show, too, where we were made to feel like pop stars as readers queued up for autographs! That's weird and doesn't happen much these days.

Aren't you *Crash*'s longest-running writer?

Yes, that's right. I started on issue 47 and wrote for the magazine until issue 98 when the company went bust. 51 issues, man and boy! I worked my way up to assistant editor by the end.

Mark Kendrick:

Then: *Art editor*

Now: *Creative director*

What was it like working at *Crash*?

I learned very quickly that this was unlike any working environment that I'd known. It was a wild time, when computer gaming was the new rock and roll and the people who worked on them were like superstars. Just reading a copy of *Crash* you, even now, get a sense of 'belonging' to a unique group of people. As crazy as this may seem, I'm really not overstating this, as I believe this injected the magazines with magic, which made them what they were.

What did you learn from working with Oli?

Perhaps the most important thing I learnt from Oli was to have confidence in your own style. His work is so distinctive, and against a backdrop of so many other styles going on at the time, his work has continued to be enduring. Overall, though, I learned the visual aspects of magazines, and in particular how cover structure and the balance between type and art is essential.

Why do you think *Crash* is still held with such high esteem?

It was the right product, at the right time, with the right tone. *Crash* came along to fuel the excitement of videogames and gave a sense of community to a new, massively expanding hobby, just when home computing became accessible to all. I look back now and I really think it would be tough for another 'independent' videogames magazine to top 100,000 sales every month ever again. They will forever be the giants of single-format games titles.

» 2 King Street, Ludlow: *Crash* and *Zzap!* Towers. Newsfield occupied the three floors above Victoria Wine from May 1985 until July 1989, when everything moved a mile away to bigger premises in Case Mill.

Christmas and you'd do two or three in a very short space of time.

RK: Famously, Gary Liddon actually lived in King's Street, sleeping under one of the art tables for about two months until we finally decided that we couldn't stand it any longer and kicked him out.

RG: You've been talking about the Christmas specials. Why did you decide to start doing Christmas-themed covers?

OF: It just made perfect sense because it was Christmas. We always tried to accumulate as many pounds worth of prizes as possible as well to make it more enticing. Also, I used to find the covers really challenging, as you always had to find interesting ways of combining Santa Claus with aliens.

RK: I was actually a fan of the Amstrad Christmas cover as it had some really realistic depictions of the editorial team on it.

RG: The editorial team would always have a strong presence within the magazine and often appeared on the cover. Do you think this helped build the relationship with your readers?

MU: Absolutely, and I think that it's identifying that we're just normal people, and if you like shoot-'em-ups and you knew Julian [Rignall] liked it, you knew that it was going to be a good game.

RK: It worked particularly well on *Zzap!*, because by then there were fixed reviewers and not these pools of roaming reporters. I think being able to identify with a reviewer's tastes and preferences really helped a lot and again made the likes of *Crash* and *Zzap!* stand apart from their competitors.

RG: So, with three people reviewing the same game, was there much of a collaboration process on the reviews?

MU: In *Crash* in particular I used to play the game to death, Roger would play it and watch me play the game, and another reviewer would play the game to death as well. They were all fairly independent.

RK: I remember it could sometimes get quite heated with everyone disagreeing with each other on certain games and then I'd have to step in, not to get them to agree, but to get them to agree to disagree with each other. I think there were definitely times when someone would go off in a huff and say, 'Well, you can write what you like, then', but they always came back and ended up writing what they were going to say in the first place.

RG: Now one of the most famous members of the editorial team on *Crash* wasn't even real. How did Lloyd Mangram come about?

MU: I could have sworn I saw him the other day in town. [everyone starts laughing]

RK: Well, there is a Lloyd's Pharmacy [in the town], as someone pointed out to us online when they were in Ludlow. They thought he'd gone into the pharmacy business.

» Franco Frey doing techie things with a Spectrum – mostly removing sandwich crumbs from the rubber key matrix… (1986)

RG: Was it just a way of making the editorial team look bigger?

RK: Of course. [more laughing] We were such a tiny team that we needed to create credible other people.

MU: It was also a useful way of airing some of the views and opinions that we weren't quite sure about.

RK: Lloyd's main job was the letters page. We'd always intended to have a reasonable number of pages for letters and it required a character to run those pages as if it was the love of his life, just as it was for the reviewers to review their games. And also to give snappy responses to sassy 14-year-olds who thought they knew it all.

RG: How many letters did you get on average a month?

RK: By issue 5 we were getting around 300 to 500 letters a month. By the time we were hitting a 106,000 ABC it was impossible to respond. We were far and away Ludlow Post Office's biggest customer.

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 41

Barbarian

I'll admit that I got rather carried away on the blood and impending horror that features on this *Barbarian* cover. In fact, WHSmith complained and gave us stern warnings over future re-offending…

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 6

3D Feature

To illustrate a look at perspective in games we decided to achieve a 3D effect by photographing three layers painted by me to allow the shift in focus to create the three-dimensional look.

» Matthew Uffindell taking screenshots for a review, days after moving the office from Old Street to King Street. (Mid-1984)

RG: Is it true that stores were asking for your proofs so they could see early review scores and stock their shelves accordingly? That must have felt good.

RK: Yes that did happen for a couple of years or more. Once buyers had cottoned on to *Crash* it happened a lot. We would send them the early proofs of particular reviews and they made buying and stocking decisions on those reviews. Of course it felt good. It's a little easy to be smug about it, but we don't know of any other magazines that were doing it at the time or getting that sort of attention.

RG: Where did the idea for The Terminal Man originate?

OF: Because the magazine was aimed at teenage boys and was about videogames I somehow felt that it needed a comic strip. Roger agreed, but he did feel that I was taking on quite a lot, as it was effectively four extra pages every month. I can't remember quite how but I managed to get hold of Kelvin Gosnell who was the editor of *2000 AD* at one point and he came up with the idea for The Terminal Man. He wrote the first story all by himself.

RG: So it went away, came back and then…

OF: It stopped.

RG: So what happened, and was it a hard decision to make?

OF: We decided – well, I decided – that he ought to come back. I started writing the stories and what happened was I came under so much time pressure that I wasn't keeping up and unfortunately it sort of stopped midstream.

RK: It was a hard decision.

OF: But on the other hand, I didn't want to have a nervous breakdown.

RK: By then we had five magazines and other stuff on the table of which Oliver was art director, and it was quite clear it had to stop. In fact, it took him more time doing four pages of The Terminal Man every month than working on an actual cover.

RG: So how do you think videogame magazines compare now to the likes of Crash and Zzap!64?

RK: I would have to be honest and say that I rarely ever look at them, so I'm not really the best judge. What I do see, however, is that they're far more sophisticated and you can do fabulous things today that would have taken us hours back in the day. We used every trick in the book to get as much colour in the magazine as possible and today that's not something that people even consider.

MU: As far as content goes, it's quite similar really. You have your review and then your verdict and maybe an award. Has it changed? I think what's really changed is… How shall I put this? We felt connected with our readers; I'm not so certain if these people feel as connected with their readers. I'll be honest with you: I never buy a magazine for games reviews now. I just type in a game on the internet and get given a list of reviews to read.

RG: *Crash* had a particularly big influence on later games magazines. Is this something you'd agree with?

RK: I'd go further. I'd say that not necessarily the look or the layout, but the attitude of *Crash* informed magazines like Emap's *Empire*, with this notion that you don't have to be serious and detailed. When *Empire* came out I remember thinking that the biggest compliment was seeing '*Empire* Towers' and thinking, 'Where did that come from?' I think the attitude informed Emap a lot, and yes, it certainly went a way to changing how videogame magazines looked and felt.

OF: For me I think what really makes a magazine work, especially for young readers, is to make them feel as much a part of the magazine's world as possible. That's all we ever tried to do with *Crash*.

» The target market getting their first look at *Crash* #2, the *Kong* cover. (1984)

Crash. The followers speak

Despite the fact that it's now over a quarter of a century old, *Crash* and sister mag *Zzap!64* are still held in high esteem by a great many *Retro Gamer* readers. We've already heard first-hand why Oliver, Roger and Matthew felt the magazine was a success, but what about its still-loyal fan base?

■ Forum ID: the_hawk
For me it was the beautiful artwork, *Lunar Jetman* and the slightly more trustworthy reviews than *Your Sinclair* and *Sinclair User*. It was NEVER as funny as *Your Sinclair*, though.

■ Forum ID: SirClive
It was written by gamers, rather than journalists, so you could trust it. It was basically a commercial fanzine and that gave it a unique feel.

■ Forum ID: Beakerzoid
The layout, design, and the writing all combined to give a trustworthy source of info and reviews on all things Speccy related. Yes, *Your Sinclair* was funnier, but *Crash* was the more reliable source. As SirClive so rightly points out, it was written by people who genuinely had a love for the subject they were writing about. It was such as shame when all the mags began their 'free games' each issue, as it inevitably led to *Crash* becoming nothing more than a small bundle of papers with a tape stuck to the front.

■ Forum ID: psj3809
I just loved the layout and design. Looking at scans now brings back a ton of great memories. I trusted their reviews – yeah, there was the odd disaster, like *Zoids*. It had tons of playing tips and pokes, and some great maps every month and a lot of exclusives with previews of new games and interviews.

Huge amount of disappointment when I went to WHSmith and it wasn't there for whatever reason. On the flip-side, the Christmas specials really were amazing back then: tons of pages and it kept you reading for ages. As other people have said it was written by fans that had a genuine love for the Speccy. Brilliant magazine until it went to the pamphlet with the tape on the cover.

Perfect covers by Oli Frey, great reviews, great tips/maps, and back in the Eighties you loved seeing all the game adverts!

DYNAMITE DAN

TICK, TICK, TICK, BOOM!

PUBLISHER: MIRRORSOFT
RELEASED: 1985
GENRE: PLATFORM
FEATURED HARDWARE: SPECTRUM
EXPECT TO PAY: A FEW QUID

HISTORY

It's funny to think that when *Dynamite Dan* was released in 1985, UK gaming magazines were already predicting the death of the platform game.

The best of the breed was the previous year's *Jet Set Willy* – a squillion-selling hit from the alien mind of Matthew Smith – but the market had since stagnated thanks to dozens of cheapo clones attempting to replicate Smith's infernal code. The nadir was *Jet Set Willy II*, an embarrassing sequel that added some extra screens and bugger all else. Thank the good Lord then for *Dynamite Dan*, a platformer released at the same time as *Jet Set Willy II* that was a far worthier carrier of Miner Willy's mantle.

Like *Jet Set Willy*, the game takes place in a mansion inhabited by all manner of meanies. The typically irrelevant plot reveals that the dastardly Dr Blitzen, an evil genius with designs on world domination, owns the mansion. It's up to top secret agent Dan to pilfer the plans to a deadly ray-gun from Blitzen's safe; to gain access he must find eight sticks of dynamite scattered around the house. Blitzen's retreat is massive, but there's a handy lift, which Dan can use to access each floor, and a wooden raft that transports him through the mansion's sewer system. The player is given ten lives to get the job done, but it's not nearly enough.

It's easy to get excited about *Dynamite Dan*, even when revisiting it now. The graphics are highly detailed, smoothly animated and super colourful, with barely a hint of the dreaded colour clash. Each screen is alive and it makes you wonder how programmer Rod Bowkett managed to cram so much stuff into the Speccy's tiny brain. It's a very tight, very smart piece of programming: a product from that magic period when developers were finally beginning to master Sir Clive's machine.

It would be wrong to suggest that the game saved the platformer from an early death, but it reignited an ailing genre. *Dynamite Dan* lit the fuse in more ways than one.

TOP
SECRET

THE ULTIMATE HERO

A Complete History of Sabreman

Although Miner Willy is arguably the Spectrum's best known videogame character, Ultimate's intrepid explorer Sabreman nevertheless made his own huge impact on Sir Clive's machine. Stuart Hunt investigates the truths and myths behind Ultimate's most enduring mascot

Trying to uncover any information about the *Sabreman* series, Ultimate Play The Game, or the Stamper brothers has always proven incredibly difficult. The brothers have always been famously forward when it comes to stepping away from press attention, only giving the occasional rare interview to very lucky and select publications – most notably *Crash*, for whom the brothers had a bit of a soft spot – but giving a charmingly frank and reasonable explanation why it is that they shirk the limelight. The reason boils down to two things: the first is time – perfectly understandable, of course, seeing that for many years Tim and Chris were managing director and technical director, respectively, for one of the biggest videogame studios in Britain; and the second is that the brothers have always felt that their games should do the talking. But while the Stampers' silence is frustrating for anyone trying to glean information about their games, it was this air of mystique surrounding the company that drove the success of Ultimate and its games. And no Ultimate franchise demonstrated this thinking better than the *Sabreman* series.

In 1980, Tim Stamper, age 21, was studying physics and electronics at Loughborough University. After becoming interested in the growing advent of micro technology, he decided to quit his course and took a number of jobs working on arcade circuit boards for various firms. When Chris asked his brother one day to assist him with one of his arcade projects, Tim was immediately hooked. And with the help of Tim's girlfriend (now wife), Carol Ward, and college friend John Latchbury, the brothers decided to form the Leicestershire-based company Ashby Computers and Graphics (ACG) in the exotic-sounding town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Armed with a small team of software engineers, ACG started

developing arcade conversion kits for license to various companies. In terms of *Sabreman*'s history, probably their most notable arcade project was the quirky 1983 title *Dingo*, which the Stampers produced in collaboration with Japanese developer Jaleco. Assuming the role of something that resembled a koala, your mission was to collect all the fruit scattered on colourful single-screen levels while avoiding things that looked like hopping pink unicorns – though it's feasible that these could be the titular dingos, as *Sabre Wulf* later showed that the Stampers weren't averse to giving enemies top billing. *Dingo* played a lot like *Pac-Man* but had visuals awash with the same intricate detail and colour that we would later associate with the tropical screens in *Sabre Wulf*.

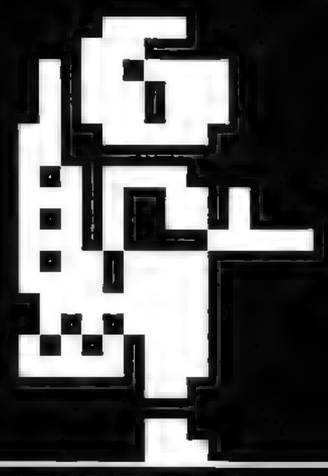
Eventually, though, the Stampers decided that coin-ops weren't marketable and so focused their efforts on the emerging British home computer scene instead, concentrating on writing games for the Spectrum and doing so under the label Ultimate Play The Game. Like all successful videogame partnerships, Tim and Chris took on different roles to make Ultimate a success. Tim was largely responsible for the in-game graphics and packaging illustrations, while Chris, the older of the two, took on most of the coding and programming duties. Ultimate's first commercial hit came in 1983 with the release of the 16K Spectrum game *Jetpac*. This was shortly followed by the bug-zapping title *Pssst* and the seminal adventure maze smash *Atic Atac*. In a time when most home computer games were rudimentary variants of arcade titles, the trend that home computer and videogames should offer more depth and variety was first starting to happen with the release of Ultimate's early titles. The Stampers' games were sprawling arcade-style releases that couldn't be played in arcades, and they felt more epic than anything that had come before.

Rare Heroes

We take a look back at Rare's impressive portfolio of games to remember some more of its heroes

Battletoads

Spawning five games, all famed for their humour, variety and insane difficulty, the Battletoads – Rash, Pimple and Zitz – proved a popular videogame rival to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and a great technical and creative showcase for Rare.

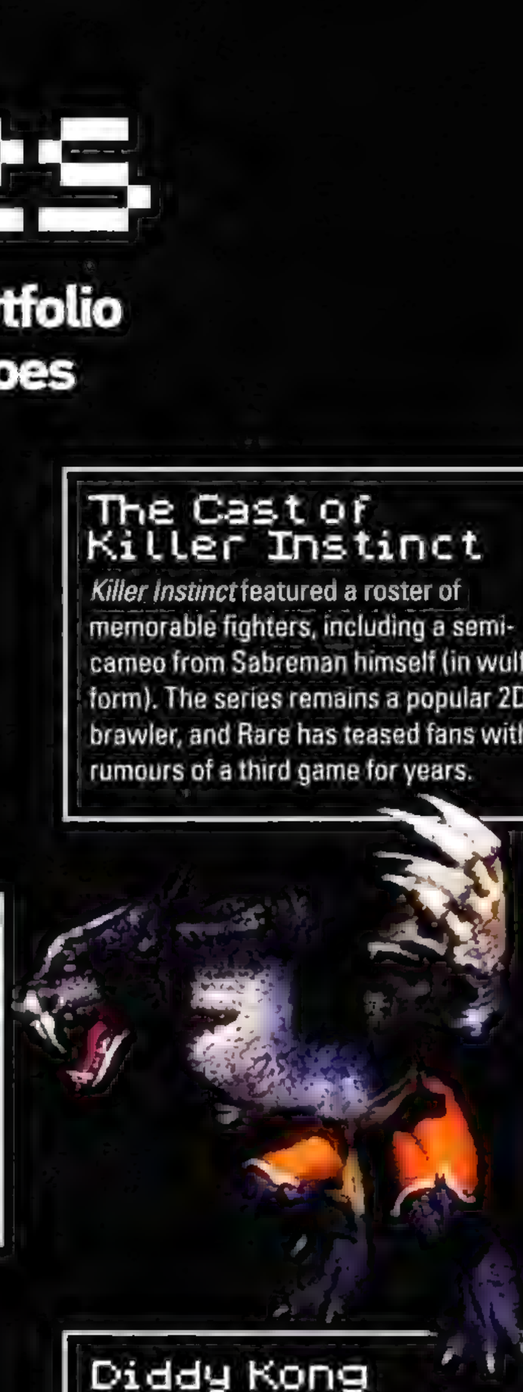


Jetman

While very little is known about the character, Jetman was Ultimate's first videogame hero and went on to become a popular gaming character on the Spectrum. His popularity eventually led to him having his own comic strip series in *Crash* magazine.

The Cast of Killer Instinct

Killer Instinct featured a roster of memorable fighters, including a semi-cameo from Sabreman himself (in wulf form). The series remains a popular 2D brawler, and Rare has teased fans with rumours of a third game for years.



Joanna Dark

Rare performed magic once again with the sultry agent Joanna Dark. Not since the arrival of the intergalactic bounty hunter Samus Aran – and it's very likely that she had a big influence on Joanna – had gamers seen such a strong and believable leading lady.

Mr Pants

Originally a crude mascot on Rare's website, the character later received his own GBA puzzler titled *It's Mr Pants*. Originally unveiled as *Donkey Kong Coconut Crackers*, the theme had to be altered following Rare's purchase by Microsoft in 2002.

Banjo and Kazooie

After gamers were left dumbstruck by *Super Mario 64*, Rare matched Nintendo's classic platformer with one of its own. Gorgeous and massive in scope, the original *Banjo-Kazooie* created a popular videogame double act as they worked as a team to solve puzzles.

Diddy Kong

Only Rare could breathe new life into a Nintendo character with such aplomb. *Donkey Kong Country* helped put Rare on the map, bring Donkey Kong back to life, and cement Rare's relationship with Nintendo. Diddy represents an indelible footprint of that relationship.

Kuros the knight

Spanning a series of four games, of which Rare only developed the first and last, *Wizards & Warriors* games were hack-and-slash adventure affairs with Rare's trademark emphasis on collecting things. In each title you assumed the role of the knight Kuros.

Rattle and Roll

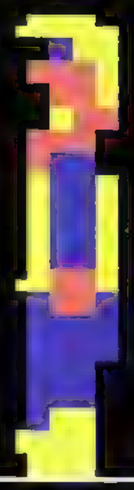
While Rare handled the NES conversion of *Marble Madness*, it had already touched on the isometric puzzle game formula with *Bubbler*. However, it would really surpass itself with *Snake Rattle N Roll*, with its addictive gameplay and surrealist humour.

Jet Force Gemini

Jet Force Gemini was an epic third-person action game that borrowed elements from *Sabre Wulf*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *GoldenEye*. Visually breathtaking, the game split opinion with fans, which is perhaps why Rare has yet to do anything else with the game's heroes.

Sir Arthur Pendragon

While Ultimate favoured the Spectrum, the company produced a number of Commodore 64 titles. The most well-known offerings starred this recurring adventuring aristocrat across a series of action/puzzle games.



Conker

Conker underwent a dramatic transformation for Rare's final N64 title. Originally a cutesy platform hero, Rare decided to rethink the character and turned him into a swearing antihero in an adventure that smacked a little of *Dude, Where's My Car?*.

Very quickly Ultimate positioned itself as an important and shining player in Spectrum gaming. While the company did write a number of Commodore-specific titles over the years, the Stampers chose not to handle CPC, MSX, BBC Micro and C64 conversions of their hit Spectrum games, but farm them out to third-party companies instead – most notably *Firebird*, which handled the C64 conversions of *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde*. Speaking to *The Games Machine* in March 1988, Chris Stamper explained why this was.

"I never got to know [the C64] that much. You tend to focus on one area, and I think I was a Z80 programmer to start off with, and so I adopted the Spectrum. I had no trouble with 6502 or anything like that – the Nintendo 6502 – but I was working on the Spectrum and there were other people doing the 64."

Tim, who is said to be the more business-minded of the pair, followed up with a slightly more mercantile reasoning: "We were interested in producing original games, and people wanted us to produce original product, so work for the 64 was really a job for somebody else. We could only have produced one type a year if we did all the conversions ourselves."

In 1984, the first of the four games that make up the Spectrum *Sabreman* series was released. *Sabre Wulf* was a colourful action game that introduced

» Some reviewers criticised *Sabre Wulf* for simply being *Atic Atac* in wulf's clothing.

the world to the game's iconic pith-helmeted hero. Playing the role of a stumpy adventurer named Sabreman, your mission was to navigate through a colourful 2D tropical maze, made up of 256 flip-screens, to seek four pieces of the ancient ACG amulet – a subtle nod to Ashby Computers and Graphics – that granted him safe passage by the Keeper guarding the exit to the maze. During his mission, Sabreman had to be watchful for enemy insects and tropical animals and defeat them using his trusty sabre – or, when tackling some of the bigger foes, such as hippos and boars, by frightening them with his fencing skills. On top of this, he also had to be watchful for the titular Sabre Wulf, an invincible enemy that appeared in certain areas of the maze, and had to be careful not to get caught dawdling either as a deadly sentient fire would flash up to usher him on his way.

Sabre Wulf was essentially an interactive maze, but one brimming with intricate detail,

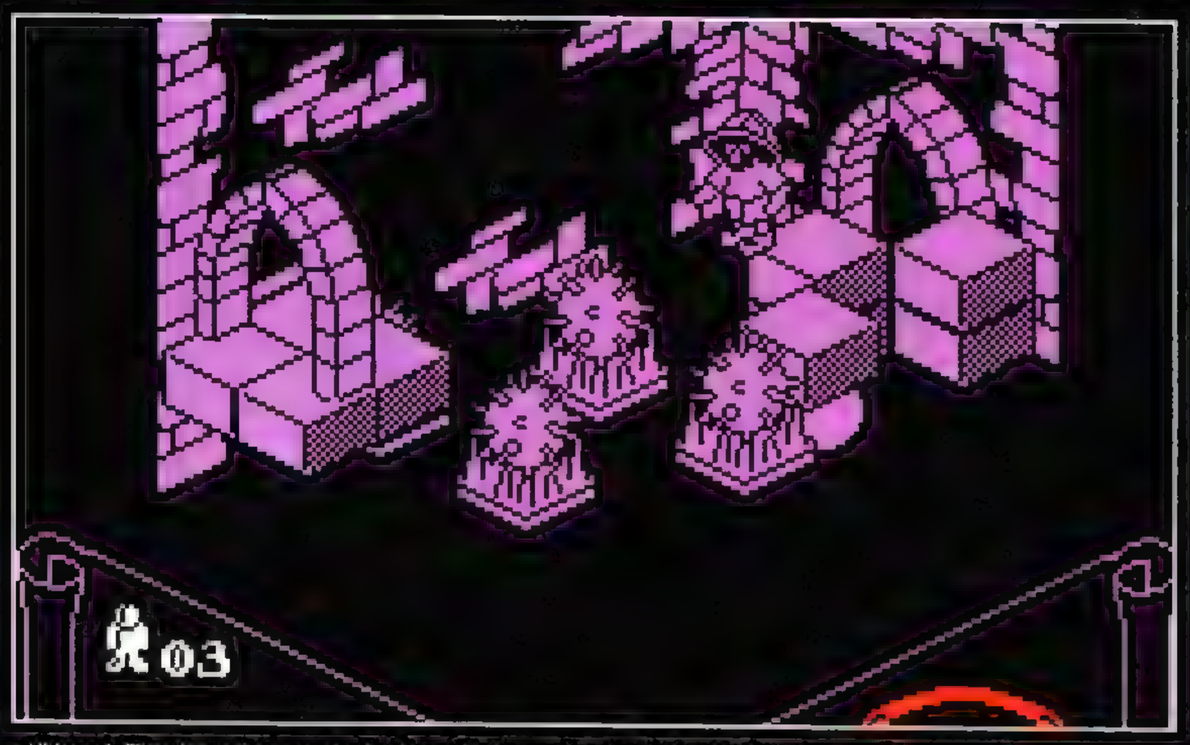
» Ultimate's *Knight Lore* single-handedly revolutionised microcomputer gaming.

gobsmacking colour and some satisfying hack-and-slash combat – although the fact that Sabreman couldn't attack enemies above and beneath him was a bit problematic. Look beneath its bright shrubbery and there were also some subtle arcade accents to be found, likely influenced by the Stampers' arcade past. The game was two-player – though only in the Speccy and C64 versions and not at the same time – and its display had a clear and clean arcade feel to its layout. The game was full-screen with no intrusive object screens or inventory panels to encroach on your peripheral vision, with the high score tallies positioned at the top corners of the screen.

Sabre Wulf was the first Ultimate title to be adorned with the iconic Ultimate Play The Game frame packaging, and to also ditch the traditional £5.50 price point and retail at £9.95. In an interview with *Crash*, Tim revealed why it was that they took the gamble to increase *Sabre Wulf*'s price.

"We were having a severe problem with the number of [illegal] copies. And I think going from £5.50 to £9.95 was a bold step we took. The price was gradually creeping up, and I thought we might go the whole way and put the product out at a price that was realistic for the time involved in creating it. We were trying to create an incentive for the person who paid £9.95 to say, 'Hey, you're not copying my game!'"

The strategy worked. *Sabre Wulf* smashed all sales records for Ultimate, and even surpassed Activision's monster smash *Ghostbusters*. More importantly, though, Chris and Tim had succeeded in coming up with a classic and



» Ultimate's Filmation technique not only allowed for impressive visuals, but also let you move objects around.

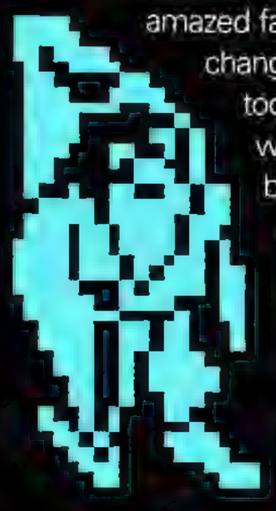
» *Pentagram* had Sabreman drop the adventure threads for a Gandalf fancy dress costume.

» Look out it's the titular wulf. He's no ordinary wolf either, as Sabreman contracts lycanthropy from him.

"Chris and Tim succeeded in coming up with a classic and lasting videogame hero"

lasting videogame hero in Sabreman. Boasting a memorable name and quirky look, thanks to his sword and pith helmet, Sabreman not only slotted perfectly into the archetypal mould of the 8-bit videogame hero – essentially an everyman character with a large nose and a hat – but the character's clean and chunky design also partnered brilliantly with the technical limitations of the Spectrum.

But despite its popularity and commercial success, there was one criticism that some reviewers levelled at *Sabre Wulf*. Many argued that it was too similar to the Stampers' previous smash *Atic Atac*. Despite the improvement in visuals and the tweak in perspective, some felt that the game borrowed heavily from *Atic Atac*'s maze layout and criticised the Stampers for not pushing the envelope quite as far as they had with their previous titles. With that in mind, it's no surprise that, for the next game in the series, the Stampers took a slightly different approach to the game. *Underwurlde* featured a brand new side-on perspective, which gave the game an almost platform game appearance. The gameplay also adhered to this platformer-style approach, with a fidgety-feeling Sabreman spelunking and jumping through the game's castle and deep through its underground caverns. While the viewpoint and gameplay were once again tweaked, *Underwurlde* still retained Ultimate's signature flip-screen design, this time across a colossal 597 screens, making for another sprawling adventure. Perhaps the biggest change that the Stampers introduced with *Underwurlde* was disallowing enemies from directly killing or causing damage to Sabreman. Instead, they could only harm him by pushing him to his death. The story found Sabreman trapped in the cavernous Underwurlde. Without his trusty sword for protection, Sabreman had to defeat one of three guardians blocking his escape by finding three weapons – a knife, dagger and torch – hidden in the caves. It was your job to help Sabreman find and use the right weapon against the corresponding demon guarding one of the exits. With three possible exits in the game, *Underwurlde* had three different endings and each end sequence led the player onto the path of the next three games that were planned for the *Sabreman* series.



While Sandy White pipped the Stampers to the post by releasing the first 3D isometric game on the Spectrum with *Ant Attack*, Ultimate's astonishing *Knight Lore*, the third title in the *Sabreman* saga, blew away all competition. Nothing previously released on the Spectrum came close to touching *Knight Lore* on a graphical or technical level. Set inside the exquisitely detailed rooms of Melkhior's castle and running from Ultimate's impressive Filmation engine, *Knight Lore* oozed atmosphere and quality from every pixel. But it wasn't just the groundbreaking visuals and cartoon look that impressed and amazed fans; a couple of interesting changes had occurred in Sabreman too. Fully realised in 3D, and with only his eyeballs and big round nose visible from underneath his pith helmet, this more cartoon Sabreman was perfectly suited to the game's astonishing new design style. And that wasn't all, as after being bitten by the Sabre Wulf, Sabreman is left battling with lycanthropy, transforming him into a werewolf at nightfall. The game's premise found the adventurer searching the wizard's castle for the items needed to rid him of his lupine state. With a time limit of 40 days and nights to complete his mission, which dries up pretty quickly in the game world, timing and planning was needed to solve the tricky action-based puzzles and glean the required ingredients. The innovative Filmation engine also allowed Sabreman to interact with objects in the game, adding a real sense of freedom to the game and its puzzles; something never really seen before on the Spectrum. Ultimate also ensured that Sabreman's lycanthropy formed an integral part of the gameplay. In his wulf state, Sabreman could leap higher to solve puzzles that would otherwise be impossible, but was more vulnerable to particular types of enemy. But perhaps the most shocking thing about *Knight Lore* was its timing. Speaking to *Crash*, the Stampers later made the startling revelation that *Knight Lore* was written before *Sabre Wulf* was even finished. The brothers had admitted to purposely holding back the game's release for fear that no one would buy *Sabre Wulf* after seeing the new engine in action.

"*Knight Lore* was finished before *Sabre Wulf*," said Tim, speaking to *Crash*, "but we decided that the market wasn't ready for it. Because if we released *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* – which was already half-finished – we wouldn't have sold *Sabre Wulf*. So we sold *Sabre Wulf*, which was a colossal success, and then released the other two. There was a little bit of careful planning in there. But they could have had *Knight Lore* possibly a year earlier – we just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind."

Given the popularity of the Filmation engine, and the fact that a number

of software houses and programmers quickly set about trying to capitalise on its popularity, the Stampers saw no reason not to do the same, and so released more Filmation titles over the coming years including *Alien 8* (1985), *Nightshade* (1985) and later *Gunfright* (1986). It was also around this time that the Stampers set up a sister company to Ultimate named Rare Designs of the Future, which they later curtailed to the far snappier name of Rare. It transpired that as far back as 1983, while busy writing *Jetpac*, the Stampers had kept a watchful eye on the emerging Japanese videogame market, and had been secretly getting to grips with programming for Nintendo's Famicom console. The Stampers had once again predicted another big shift that was about to occur in the British game market. The thinking behind this new enterprise was that while Ultimate would handle the brothers' microcomputer output, all Nintendo and console releases would fall to Rare. This turned out to be a savvy move by the brothers, because by 1986, around the release of *Gunfright*, reviewers were expressing concerns about Ultimate's dependence on its Filmation engine. Eventually, realising that there was nowhere else they could take the Spectrum, and that it wasn't beneficial

to company expansion to continue producing games on the machine, Tim and Chris decided to sell part of Ultimate to US Gold, remaining majority shareholders in the company, and turn their attentions to Rare and breaking the console market.

Because its release fell after US Gold's part-acquisition of Ultimate, there has always been doubt over the true authors of the next game in the *Sabreman* series. *Pentagram*'s story found Sabreman on a mission to locate the titular star-shaped artefact. To complete his mission, he had to fix five broken obelisks using magically charged well water and then collect five pieces of stone to make up the magical relic. After curing him of his lycanthropy, Sabreman befriends the magician Melkhior and chooses to become his apprentice. Now a wizard, *Pentagram* marked the first time in the series that Sabreman ditched his adventuring gear, opting to wear a wizard robe and grow a beard instead.

Given that *Pentagram* didn't quite match up to the splendour of previous *Sabreman* games, and that, in another interview with *Crash*, Chris named *Gunfright* as the final game that the brothers had worked on together, its believed that *Pentagram* was either written by Tim or Chris alone, or by a team of US Gold programmers.

The Ultimate Filmation Games

Ultimate's engine powered some of the most visually impressive Spectrum games and set the company on its future path of technical innovation

Alien 8 1984

Essentially *Knight Lore* set in outer space, the Stampers' second Filmation title saw players control a square-looking maintenance droid whose mission is to keep alive the sleeping crew of a spaceship by finding the missing components needed to fix the ship's cryogenic life support machine. While its formula is similar to *Knight Lore*, the sci-fi theme feels unique enough to make it a classic in its own right. The Stampers later revealed that it was well into development before the release of *Sabre Wulf*.

Nightshade 1985

Often mistaken as an episode in the *Sabreman* series, *Nightshade* was, in fact, a standalone adventure game. Essentially a mixture of *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore*, but using scrolling screens as opposed to static ones, you played an adventurer who must rid a village of evil by vanquishing four demons. Not a patch on *Knight Lore*, and in fact quite inferior in many ways, this was the first time that voices of dissent were really starting to be heard from Ultimate fans.

Gunfright 1986

Whereas *Alien 8* launched Filmation into space, *Gunfright* shifted the engine to the Wild West. Playing the role of a town sheriff, who looks remarkably like Sabreman – possibly an ancestor – your mission was to clean up a town riddled with outlaws. Split into three stages, the first saw you practising your aim by shooting money bags, the second saw players patrolling the streets to find and capture nine wanted fugitives, and the final one finished in a dramatic gunfight.

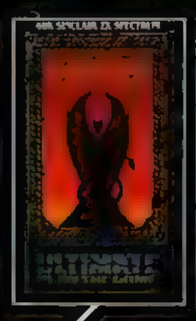
Bubbler 1987

The most technically advanced of all the Filmation titles, this sought-after Speccy and Amstrad title has fetched some astonishing prices on eBay and was the second game of the three post-Stamper Ultimate games. *Bubbler* was essentially a Filmation take on titles such as *Spindizzy* and *Marble Madness*. It finds the player transformed into a globule of slime by an evil wizard, and trying to cure this gluey state by corking bottles of magic to weaken his oppressor.

Sabreman Timeline

Sabre Wulf
The first *Sabreman* title was a 2D flip-screen adventure. It found pith-helmeted hero Sabreman trying to find pieces of an ancient amulet and escape the titular Sabre Wulf.

1984



Underwurlde
A new direction and new perspective for Sabreman saw him jumping around the dank cavernous world of Underwurlde in an enjoyable side-scrolling 2D platformer.

Knight Lore
It was the game that changed the face of Spectrum gaming forever. This pioneering isometric 3D adventure smash saw Sabreman trying to cure himself of lycanthropy after being bitten by the Sabre Wulf.

1984

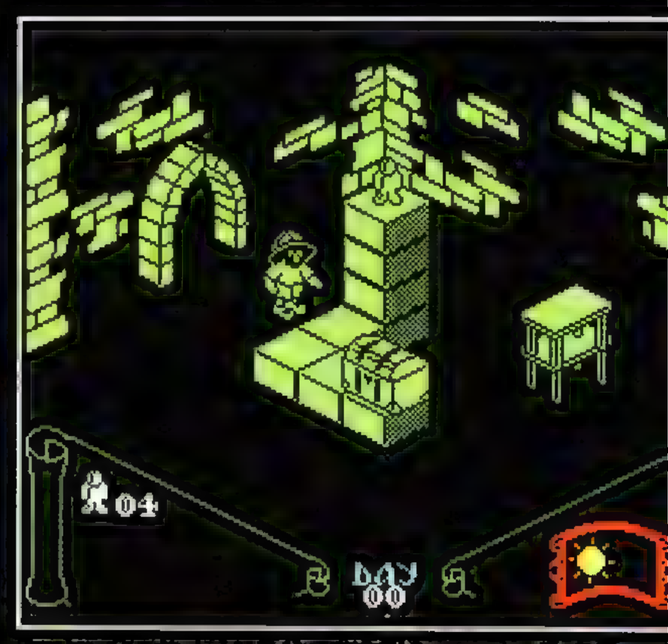
Confusing matters further, of course, is the fact that the brothers had a history of not releasing games in order of their completion – remember that they had previously held back the release of *Knight Lore* – so it's also feasible that *Pentagram* was written, or at least partially written, by the brothers collectively before *Gunfright* was even released. Regardless of who the true author of *Pentagram* is, it would be Ultimate's final *Sabreman* release, and the most ambitious of its Filmation games.

The true casualty of US Gold's partial buyout of Ultimate was the final unreleased episode in the *Sabreman* saga: *Mire Mare*. The much talked about final episode in the series, despite being mentioned in the endings of *Pentagram* and *Underwurlde*, never actually found a release. Only the Stampers know the truth, but that hasn't stopped various conspiracy theories from surfacing on the internet, and a conveniently anonymous former Ultimate staffer claiming that the game was

"That he has continued to crop up is proof that Rare has a lot of fondness for Sabreman"

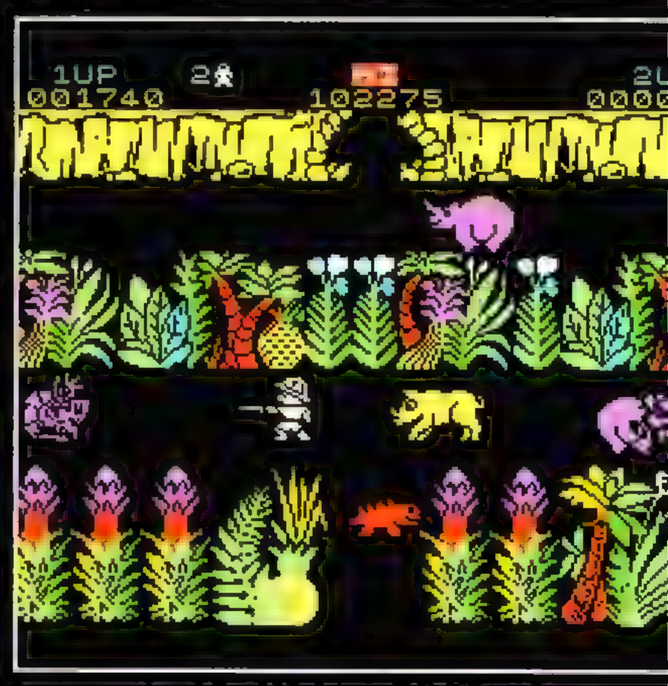
finished. While entirely speculative, it's rumoured that development of *Mire Mare* was held back by Ultimate during US Gold's partial takeover to ensure that it was its final release. But it's believed that the Stampers grew disillusioned with US Gold after learning of the company's strategy to focus on budget re-releases over investment in new titles, and as a result the game was never finished. While many fans have assumed that *Mire Mare* would keep the Filmation look of both *Knight Lore* and *Pentagram*, in 1990 it was revealed on Rare's website that the game would have played more like *Sabre Wulf*. The website also claimed that the basic game design of *Mire Mare* was finalised, but coding never commenced because of time. In hindsight, it's very unlikely that the game was finished. Knowing just how popular the series was with Spectrum owners, it's improbable that the Stampers would have blocked the release of the final game, regardless of any ill feeling between them and US Gold at the time. It's far more likely that the series was a victim of timing. As the brothers had rightly predicted, the market was changing as the reign of the microcomputer was coming to an end.

It would be 19 years before we would finally see Sabreman return to our screens in his own game. Before then, of course, the character had made a number of subtle cameo appearances in various Rare games, fuelling the belief that another *Sabreman* game was on the cards. He was the main inspiration behind the character Count Von Sabrewulf in *Killer Instinct*, and also had a minor cameo in *Banjo-Tooie*, where he appeared frozen inside a block of ice on the stage Hailfire Peaks. Rare has also made reference to Sabreman in the games *Viva Piñata* and in the GBA version of *Donkey Kong Country*, and at one time was even rumoured to be working on a racing game based on the *Sabreman* universe. Titled *Sabreman Stampede*, it was speculated that the game would have been adapted from the cancelled *Donkey Kong Racing* GameCube game. In 2004, Rare finally decided to revisit the character properly by giving him his own game. And once again it saw another change in the look and gameplay style of the series. Released for the GBA, and



» The Stampers later revealed that *Knight Lore* was actually written before the release of *Sabre Wulf*. Impressive.

» *Underwurlde* is an interesting outing for Sabreman, mainly because he no longer has his trusty sabre for protection.



» *Sabre Wulf* remains one of our favourite games to star Sabreman. We'd love to see a next generation update.

Pentagram

Sabreman ditched the helmet and shorts for a wizard getup in his fourth and final Spectrum outing. This time he was on a mission to find the scattered pieces of a magical artefact known as the Pentagram.

Mire Mare

(Unreleased)

Little is known about the planned but unreleased final chapter in the saga, though it's been rumoured that the game would have played more like *Sabre Wulf*.

Sabre Wulf (GBA)

The last game to star Sabreman saw him don his pith helmet once again for a colourful side-scrolling platform game that shared a few similarities with Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* series.

2004

We probe Rare's head of studio, Mark Betteridge, about those burning Sabreman questions

■ Did the Stampers ever tell you where the idea for Sabreman originated?
Sadly no. Maybe the result of watching *Carry On Up The Khyber* too many times? Sabreman was designed to make sure the player knew they were in the hands of an experienced, intrepid explorer before dropping them into the middle of the jungle or at the entrance to an ancient castle. It was probably a bonus that he was a quintessentially British character on a quintessentially British computer.

■ Why do you think he proved so popular on the Spectrum?
I suppose a lot of it was down to the games themselves making such an impact, and Sabreman being a representative for them. He was the common thread that ran through the whole series, and the way his characteristics changed between the games – explorer, werewolf, wizard – kept him interesting.

■ Could you tell us everything you know about *Mire Mare*?
Well, there was cover art, which we posted on the Rare website when it was plucked out of Tim's original artwork portfolio back in the late Nineties. I don't think the game itself ever got very far; it certainly wasn't completed. There was every intention of finishing and releasing it, but Ultimate's time on the 8-bit home computers turned out to be limited before it morphed into Rare and changed direction.

■ Why was *Sabre Wulf* resurrected for the Game Boy Advance as opposed to a home console?
The team just wanted to do something with one of the old Ultimate properties, and handhelds seemed like a good place to experiment with the popularity and relevance of past franchises. The style ended up being very different, but *Sabre Wulf* on the GBA turned out really well, as did *Jetpac Refuelled* on Xbox Live Arcade later. We like to revisit the old IP from time to time, but with over 25 years of characters and series to work with and the constant need for new titles on top of that, we can never make everything that we want to!

■ Whose idea was it to stick him in *Banjo-Tooie* and was there any truth to the rumours of a proposed N64 game?
That was lead designer Gregg Mayles. The *Banjo* team are known for including self-referential bits and pieces, from the posters in *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* to the game discs in *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*. In *Tooie*'s case, Gregg needed a character that had been frozen in ice for years and he wanted it to be someone recognisable, so he went all the way back through Rare's history to Sabreman. There were no N64 *Sabreman* games proposed – *Tooie* was his only appearance on the system.

■ Tell us a little about *Sabreman Stampede* on the Xbox.
It was conceived as a sort of Xbox successor to the similarly unreleased *Donkey Kong Racing* template featuring jungle animals instead of vehicles, but it soon evolved into something more adventure-based, which better suited the character. One of the senior team members recently described it as "like *Jambo Safari* and *Grand Theft Auto* rolled into one". Make of that what you will!

» Sabreman appears to have been officially retired. We hope that one day he'll make a return.

confusingly titled *Sabre Wulf*, the game wasn't a portable remake as many fans assumed but more of a cutesy reboot of the series. A side-scrolling platform romp that shared a number of similarities to Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* titles – most notably that many of the missions required Sabreman to enlist the help of various jungle creatures – it saw Sabreman travelling to a variety of villages, all taking their names from Ultimate games, to solve the puzzles required to enter Sabre Wulf's various lairs. While Sabreman had taken the platform game route once before with *Underwurlde*, the epic and mature feel that the series is renowned for was lost among the cute and colourful aesthetics of this portable outing, and left many fans disappointed and confused as to what Rare has in store for the character.

Whatever the future holds for Sabreman, it's clear that the character still features prominently in Rare's impressive catalogue. The very fact that the character has continued to crop up in various Rare titles over the years is unmitigated proof that the company obviously holds a lot of adoration and fondness for the character. And while many passionate retro fans would be happy for Sabreman's adventures to continue on for many years to come, we can understand Rare's want to use the character sparingly. In terms of quality, the worst thing Sonic ever did was become a household name. The popularity of Sega's zippy mascot is a contributing factor to why he quickly got enveloped by annoying peripheral characters and silly gameplay gimmicks as Sega tried to capitalise on his popularity. Even Mario, unarguably the most popular videogame character in history, has been lent out to projects less befitting of his stature over the years. Can the same really be said about Sabreman? While his 2004 return might not have been quite what fans had in mind for their hero, the GBA title was still an enjoyable and quirky platform adventure, and has done nothing to tarnish the heritage of the character. It's just a shame that, in 2007, the Stampers left Rare, as unless they plan on making a triumphant return to the games industry any time soon, it's looking increasingly unlikely that we will ever get to hear the definitive story behind the *Sabreman* series, that US Gold relationship and what actually happened to *Mire Mare*. One thing is certain, though: if we are fortunate enough to ever find out the truth, you'll be the first to know.

MATTHEW SMITH

AFTER YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, THE CREATOR OF MANIC MINER AND JET SET WILLY IS BACK LIVING AT THE FAMILY HOME IN LIVERPOOL WHERE HE CODED THOSE TWO SPECTRUM CLASSICS. MATTHEW SMITH AND HIS MUM GAVE PAUL DRURY A UNIQUE THROUGH-THE-KEYHOLE EXPERIENCE. HERE ARE 13 SCENES FROM A LOST WEEKEND

'This room was piled high with papers and the dog was always coming in and pissing on them,' explains Matthew.

'That's a lie!' protests his mum. 'My dog was very good.'

'Right, I must have been doing it myself,' says Matt.

'It was more likely to be one of the cats,' suggests mum.

'It must have had an enormous bladder, then,' he mutters.

The three of us are standing in the room where *Jet Set Willy* was written. The workstation which once housed a TRS-80 Model 3, a five-meg hard drive and a Spectrum, has been replaced by a glass display cabinet. Four porcelain swans, heads bent, sit atop it. And we're trying to determine which of the family pets urinated on the maps of Willy's mansion.

'Anyway mum, they were your cats.'

Mum suspects that Matthew never really liked any of her animal friends. 'I left that Labrador here one day and Matthew tried to swap it for an Alsatian.'

He chuckles, sheepishly. 'I tried to take it for a walk and it just wasn't a walking dog. So I tried to swap it for one that was.'

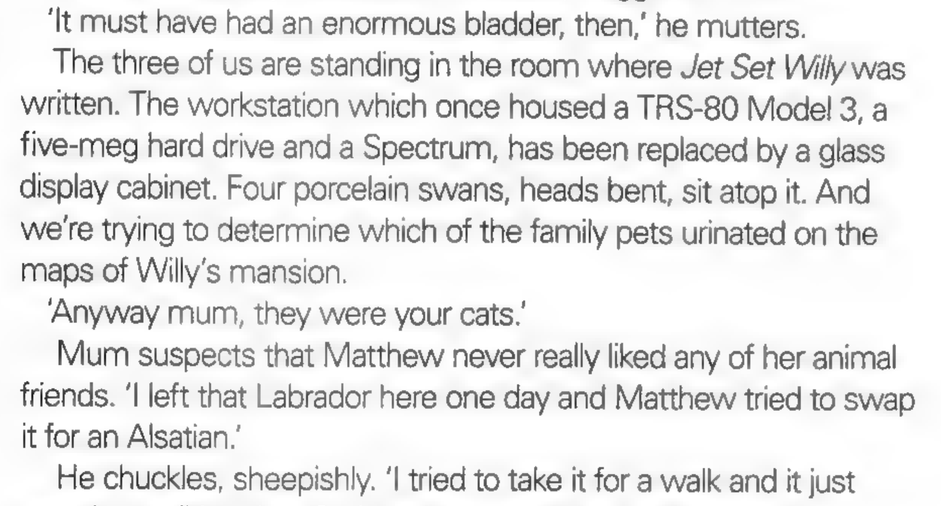
'His problem was he was born totally brilliant,' says mum.

We're sitting round the kitchen table now, sharing Guinness and watching the ashtray fill up.

'When he went to school at four, they gave him a reading age of 13 and a half. He sailed through primary school doing what he wanted to do. That's not necessarily good. He learned to read himself, sitting in his pram. You'd be wheeling him down the road and he'd be reading the adverts in the shops. If he didn't know a word, he'd ask what it was. At three he could read a newspaper. That was his party piece: Look Matthew's reading the paper!'

'Now I'm 42 and I'm not allowed to climb a ladder in case I fall off and hurt myself,' observes Matt, dryly.

Mum waves the remark away. 'Well, that's your mother.'



We noticed this master copy of *Jet Set Willy II* underneath a Guinness can on Matt's desk. He's promised not to tape over it.

'Oh yes, he was one of these self-contained kids that you want to say, "Go out and play with your friends." But no, he was happy with his own company. Which to a mother isn't a particularly good thing.'

Mum and Matthew exchange a glance and a smile.

'He'd show me these drawings, but not knowing what a computer game was, it didn't mean anything. I mean, they didn't really exist.'

Matt nods. 'I was working out how to make games before I had a computer, scribbling on graph paper at the back of the class. My first game design was actually Jimmy Carter in a rowing boat being chased by rabbits.'

I begin to speculate whether this was an early indication of his slightly surreal game design tendencies, before Matthew points out it was based on an actual incident where the US President was subject to an unprovoked attack from a killer swamp rabbit while out fishing.

'I drew the graphics for that, but there was no way to program it. There weren't really computers at the time.'

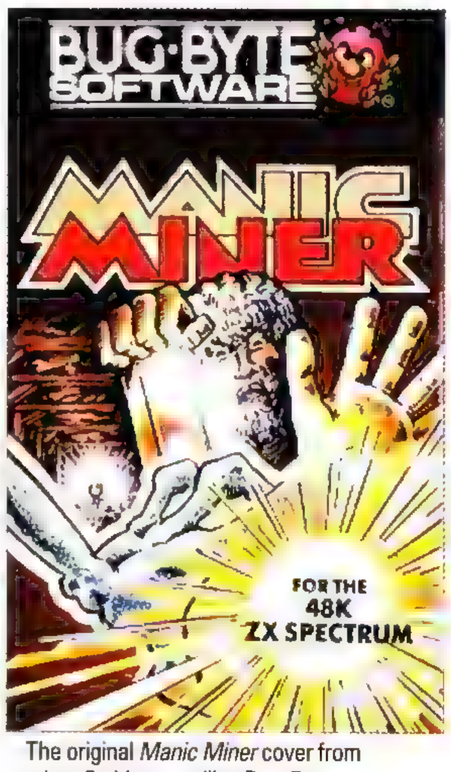
'His stepfather bought him his first computer,' interjects mum. It's the only time the man who also gave Matthew the surname Smith is mentioned.

'That was the Tandy in 1979,' confirms Matt. 'I'd first seen *Space Invaders* in the leisure centre where they filmed the stadium scenes for *Chariots Of Fire*. They couldn't get enough extras so they had to use cardboard cutouts. That machine is what got me thinking. When I got my TRS-80, I thought, right I'll play some *Space Invaders*, but I just couldn't get a good version. That was a motivation...'

I open up the draft of Adrian Robson's book, *Miner Willy – From Rags To Riches* at the page featuring *Delta Tau One*, Matt's first published game.

'Ah, my version of *Galaxian*, yeah. In machine code in 4K. On a 1 MHz machine. You don't want to go there. And you certainly don't want to play *Galaxian*.'

Matt at his *JSW* workstation, complete with a Tandy Model 4 and a homemade cable to squirt the code over to his trusty Spectrum.



The original *Manic Miner* cover from when Smith was still at Bug-Byte.

A visit to the New Brighton arcades of his youth in 2006.

He wipes the remains of some Guinness from his top lip and grins like a Cheshire Catweazle.

'I wrote it, showed it all my friends in the Tandy shop and sent it to Molimerx in Bexhill-on-Sea. They were the only publisher of TRS-80 games back then. I got a letter of acceptance back saying they'd stick it in their catalogue, though I think they accepted everything. The catalogue was about that thick…'

Matt holds up his fingers to indicate telephone directory girth.

'It retailed at £14.95, which was pretty much the normal price and I think they paid 20 per cent of retail. I got a cheque for close to 50 quid so that means they sold, what, fifteen copies?'

Matt squints at the screenshot and reads the '© M. Smith' aloud.

'Maybe I should have chased them for a second cheque,' he muses.

So when did you realise that your lad had talent?

'Oh I always knew he had something, that he had great ability,' says mum proudly.

'I think it was when I was putting cheques into her bank account because I didn't have one myself,' offers Matt.

'You never did that!'

'Alright it didn't happen, I wasn't there.'

'That £3,000 you made from *Valhalla*…'

'*Styx*,' Matthew corrects her.

'That went on a new computer and a ski trip for you and Patrick,' mum reminds him.

Ah, the Italian holiday where the first sketches for *Manic Miner* were pencilled into that red notebook? They both nod and begin to roll up fresh cigarettes.

'Patrick was the son of a family friend, the family that first introduced us to Wallasey,' remembers mum. 'He had the same wacky sense of humour as Matthew.'

'He's a hypnotherapist in Kingston on Thames now,' observes Matt.

'I remember when he finished *Manic Miner*,' says mum. 'He copied it on to this tape, put his coat on and ran off to take it where it should be. It was his from start to finish.' We're all in the front room, next to the desk that a 16-year-old Matt must have jumped up from, clutching that precious code before dashing outside. His very own 'eureka!' moment.

'Every now and again I'd take it over to Bug-Byte and meet up with Chris Cannon and Steve, some friends from Tandy. Not that often, maybe two or three times. It only took eight weeks.'

So was it all yours, Matt? Did they offer you any feedback or contribute ideas?

'Nah, all the suggestions had been talked about previously, before I started, with Alan Maton. He came up with the name. The game we were talking about was a lot more like *Space Panic*. There would have been digging and going up and down ladders and stuff. I think I got the jumping thing working first and decided that was enough. A jumping game is simpler to do. And I said, "Look, I can make ladders you can jump up!" As it happens the platform game I'm doing at the moment for phones has proper climbing…'

'He was going to have a year out before he went into sixth form just to have a go at it and of course success came like that, almost overnight.' Mum shakes her head and taps the ash from her roll up. 'The instant success and the instant money did worry me at that age. Money can be a dangerous thing. Too much too soon. Mothers see a broader picture.'

Matthew throws his head back and looks at the ceiling. 'I say not enough and not soon enough.'

'Of course I was worried you were doing too much partying,' says mum. 'All these hangers on saying, "Are you coming for a drink?" and, "Are you buying?"'

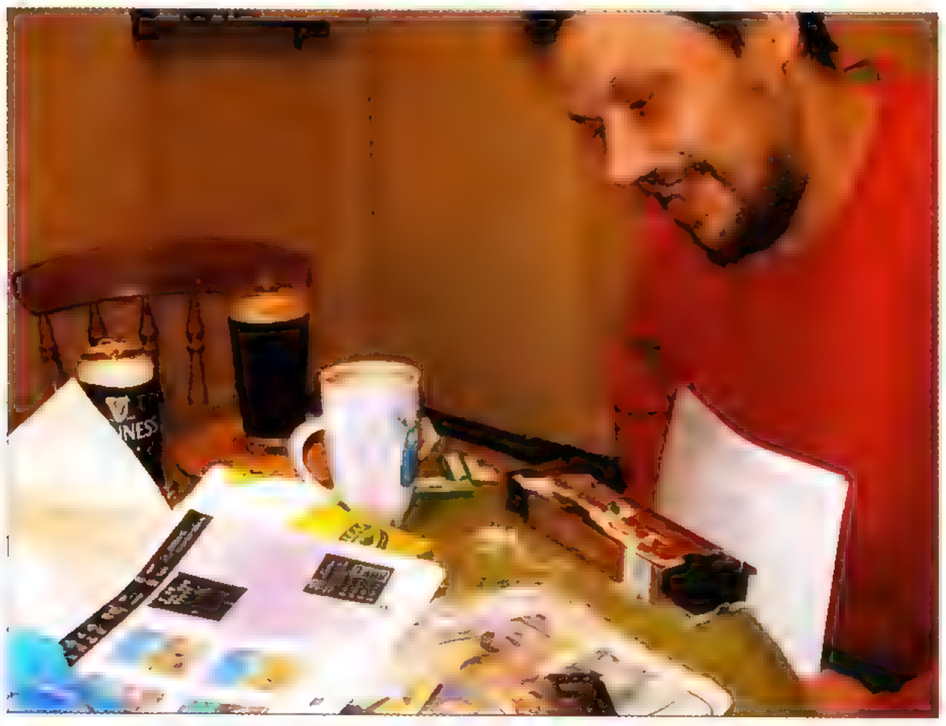
Matt leans against the door to the lounge. The very same lounge where he wrote *Jet Set Willy*. By this time, the largest room in the whole house had become Matt's office space and also his unofficial staging area.

Matt nods. 'Had half the world in this room. Starting with Alan behind me, prodding me, saying, "Go on, do another screen…"'

'At that point, Matthew had lost his individuality, his freedom, everything really, to them. He was the goose that was going to lay the golden eggs.'

'I was property.'

But Matt, you were a director of the company. Surely the idea of setting up Software Projects was that you could no longer be pushed around or ignored?

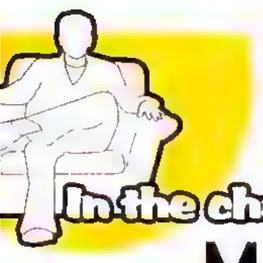


'Not as good as Bill Hogue's', concludes Matt of his *Galaxian* clone *Delta Tau One*.

Matt in his new computer room. 'I've taken to sleeping on the sofa again, just like the old days.'

"THE INSTANT SUCCESS AND THE INSTANT MONEY DID WORRY ME AT THAT AGE. MONEY CAN BE A DANGEROUS THING. TOO MUCH, TOO SOON. MOTHERS SEE A BROADER PICTURE"

MATTHEW SMITH'S MUM



In the chair with...

MATTHEW SMITH

Mother and son mull over those pre-Game Boy designs for a handheld computer.

'That was the plan,' he says, forcing a smile. 'But 33 per cent is a minority share. I was still on my own.'

Mum has her own theory. 'By the time he'd done *Jet Set Willy*, he was tired, he needed a break for a while, but the pressure was on to do the next game. Anything creative can't just be churned out to order, but the money went to Alan's head.'

Matt looks at his mum. 'To be fair it went to everyone's head. Absolutely everyone's.'

Mum returns from upstairs holding a page from a large sketchpad. It's from 1984 and is entitled: 'Optimal Design for Home Computer using available components by Matthew from Earth.' The screen resolution is marked as 320x200. A side-on view suggests a joystick could be attached in place of a keypad. There's a cartridge port, with a slot that looks all ready to accept Interface One-sized carts. It looks uncannily like a prototype for Nintendo's original Game Boy, which didn't appear till five years later. Did you show this anyone, Matt?

'Oh no. This is all secret. I had a planner's chest full of secret designs,' he says.

This reminds mum of another enterprising chap. 'That bloke who won *The Apprentice* said he'd always admired Alan Sugar since his dad had bought him an Amstrad and he'd played *Jet Set Willy*. Oh, I felt a tingle of pride when I heard that,' she beams.

Matt is less than enthused. 'Every time I see bloody Alan Sugar I think you owe me 10p for every one of those phones you sold with my game on it.'

Mum ignores him. 'You know we had all sorts of press round back then. Thames Television rang him up and asked him to go on *Tiswas*, but he never did.'

'I was too busy by then,' says Matt. 'Or too closeted.'

Mum has headed off to bingo for the evening and we're crouched round the laptop watching the walkthrough of *Manic Miner*. Suddenly Matt notices an anomaly – the Bug-Byte amoebatrons are gone, but the Software Projects' logo doesn't appear on The Warehouse screen.

'Ah, this could be a very late Bug-Byte version, or a very early Software Projects version,' he says, with a knowing wag of his finger. 'With Bug-Byte, I'd take the tape myself up three floors to the tape duplicators. They had a whole floor at Canning Place. They'd stick my cassette on their posh tape deck and played it loads and loads of times onto one big master, these massive ten-inch reels and they used that to copy at high speed onto cassettes. That master would be going over the tape heads all day, so when it wore out they'd come and get me to make a new tape. I'd get the latest version off the Tandy and squirt it onto the Spectrum and that became the new master. And I'd change things. Quite often. That's how bugs disappear! I don't think there are any bugs in *Manic Miner* because of that. Loads in *Jet Set Willy*. That wasn't released, it escaped...'

He relights his roll up and continues. '*Jet Set Willy* was almost done when we set up Software Projects.'

You mean the mansion was all sketched out?

'Nah, that didn't really happen. I'd do a level and stick it next to that

Left to right: Little Matthew in his childhood bedroom. Close your eyes and you can see the colours, man... Matt at Nottingham's Screenplay Festival in 2005, talking to your curly haired correspondent. Available on your mobile soon?

one and then do another. That's why the map doesn't really make any sense. It was never drawn as one in the first place.'

That explains the odd architecture but what about the possessed Swiss Army knives, the deadly puddings, the pig metamorphosis and the array of inanimate objects brought disturbingly to life?

'That could be the mushrooms,' he suggests.

'Cake!' Matt declares definitively, while holding up his half-eaten doughnut triumphantly.

When I explained **Retro Gamer** readers had posted questions for him online, he immediately signed up for our forums and is now pondering such quandaries as, 'Cake or Death', which cheese to serve at retro gaming events and just who is the greatest Timelord.

He takes an especially long time considering whether he's ever been embarrassed by his cult status, before deciding, 'I enjoy it is the simple answer. I can't think of any embarrassing situations it's put me in. I mean I've had people say [he adopts a high-pitched squeak] "Matthew Smith! Sign this piece of paper for me!" Someone even asked me to sign their Spectrum once.'

Erm, that was me Matt. Does that make us all sad fanboys?

'I'm just saying I've never done it to anyone else,' he winks.

Matt reaches for his lighter. 'Let's see, how much can I say...'

I'm trying to get some details on the mobile phone game he's alluded to, but things remain vague.

'I haven't thought about it for a while. I've got three different versions of the main characters, according to what the artistic and legal imperative is,' he says mysteriously. He faffs around for five minutes, changing the hard drive of his PC at one point, and finally gets a set of sprites up on screen, including an undulating caterpillar and a waltzing pig apparently balancing a milk bottle on its snout. 'Not exactly something from my back catalogue, but very similar in style. Could be *'Mooner Wally'*.'

I completely miss the point of this copyright-skirting name change and ask if a game around flashing might expose Matt to a little controversy.

'My first thought was having him go to the moon, but a guy who shows his arse – yeah!'

He laughs loudly and continues to giggle when I show him some screenshots that **Retro Gamer**'s own Richard Burton discovered buried in Matt's old website.

'Oh Diana!. Ah, that was a platform game in Flash; based on a character done by a Sri Lankan comedienne I met on this programming forum. Nah, never got finished.'

Matthew conclusively answers the 'Cake or Death' question posed on the **Retro Gamer** forum.

Some screenshots of one of Matt's unfinished platformers, *Oh Diana!*.

All these loose ends. I press him further on his most famous lost game, *'Miner Willy Meets The Taxman'*, a ten-level horizontal-scrolling platformer for the Speccy, not to be confused with the Commodore 64's *Megatree*.

'You'd start in modern times and then go back through various periods of English history. A Tudor level, a medieval one, something with the Celtic tribes in, back to the Romans, who were the first taxmen.' He taps the side of his head. 'It's still all up here.'

Mum's back from bingo, having bagged £100. We're all toasting her success with the last of the Guinness quickly followed by a fresh bottle of red. The mood is upbeat, until mum puts down her glass.

'You know, it is bad that Matthew now has nothing. You'd think somewhere, in all these websites and talk about him, he should have some money.'

There's an awkward silence. I try to fill it by rambling on about how many people out there still care about Matthew, want to know he's okay, wonder what he's going to do next. Matt mumbles, 'Yeah,' and they both smile.

'Who'd have thought that nearly 30 years after they'd be all this interest in those early computer games,' mum says. 'I suppose for them it's history. For us it's just a few days ago.'

It goes quiet again. 'Coffee anyone?' she asks.

The next morning, Matt shows me the photographs that mum has carefully kept alongside various press cuttings of Matthew from the Eighties. There's one of him as a baby splashing in a sink, another of him with his first bike and some magazine shots of him at his workstation during the development of *Jet Set Willy*. He passes me one of himself at seven, in pyjamas, staring wide-eyed into the distance. Behind him are swirling patterns, like giant rainbow fish or peacock feathers perhaps.

'Yeah, my dad painted my bedroom wall with all these colours. Psychedelic,' he smiles, with the same twinkle in his eyes.

Before I leave, he gives me a little souvenir. It's a sketch his sister Michelle did of Matt, sprawled on a sofa, surrounded by overturned cans of lager, half-eaten tins of beans, computer manuals, crumpled fag packets, a half empty bottle of British sherry and some little scribbles of ladders and platforms.

'She was at art college when I was coding *Manic Miner*. Yeah, I imagine that's how she found me some afternoons.'

I say I'll get it framed and call it *'After Tracey Emin's Bed'*. He laughs and then suddenly notices the picture includes the family cat sitting on top of the settee.

'Now does that cat look like it has a bladder big enough to soak four inches deep of paper right through?'

"'I WAS WORKING OUT HOW TO MAKE GAMES BEFORE I HAD A COMPUTER, SCRIBBLING ON GRAPH PAPER AT THE BACK OF THE CLASS" MATTHEW SMITH

FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Durell Software

As software houses go, Durell couldn't claim to be the most prolific, exciting or successful, but it was responsible for several superb Spectrum hits, including Harrier Attack, Saboteur and Turbo Esprit. Martyn Carroll talks to its key people and charts its brief but bright history

The sum of £100 is important in the history of Durell Software, and no, it has nothing to do with the cash reward that the company offered to anyone who dobbed in a dirty pirate. Funnily enough, when Durell is mentioned these days, the topic almost always turns to this infamous £100 reward, so we began by asking Durell founder Robert White about it. Did any playground pirates do jail time for ripping off *Turbo Esprit*? Was the office inundated with illicit tapes and anonymous tip-offs? "It was an absolute hoax," he laughs. "You wouldn't go prosecuting some kid, would you? No one contacted us anyway. The only thing we got were people phoning up and saying things like, 'I've been playing *Combat Lynx* and I landed my helicopter in front of a tank and the tank drove straight through it. Why didn't it blow up?' Piracy was definitely a problem, but the reward was just a bluff really."

But what about those special Durell-branded blue cassettes that identified legitimate copies? They must have been expensive. Robert laughs again. "It was simply that our tape duplicator had some blue tapes! That was it. Nothing conscious there at all."

Forget the reward – £100 is important because that's the capital Robert used to start up Durell in 1983. With the money he bought a shiny new Oric-1 computer and taught himself how to program it. Prior to this, his background was somewhat less technical. He actually qualified as an art teacher but soon discovered that half the population had too. "I remember applying for one job and there were 800 applicants," he says. Switching career paths, he gained a degree in quantity surveying and landed a job at the Oxford Regional Health Authority. In his role as a senior architect, he used CAD software to design hospital buildings and quickly developed a fascination with computers, and in particular the notion of using computing to solve problems.

"I was in the job for three years," he says, "but then my wife's grandparents died and we had the opportunity of moving into their house, and that was out in the country in Taunton where there was a great shortage of hospitals to be designed! So I left my job, bought an Oric and basically went to work in my bedroom like a maniac. My start-up capital was the cost of the Oric, and that was all the money I had in the world. So I wrote the first of our games for the Oric to generate some income. They were pretty crap, but they sold really well as there was absolutely nothing available for the computer at the time. I could hardly not sell a game."

Staffing up

The very first Durell games were *Lunar Lander* and *Asteroids* for the 16K Oric. They were sold via mail order and as the orders stacked up, Robert quickly realised

INSTANT EXPERT

The company name comes from one of the middle names of its founder, Robert James Durell White.

Durell Software began life on 14 February 1983 with Robert as its sole member of staff. Ron Jeffs and Mike Richardson joined the company four months later.

Durell's first Oric games (*Lunar Lander* and *Asteroids*) were written in BASIC and the listings were annotated with explanatory REM statements, the idea being that budding programmers could understand how the games worked.

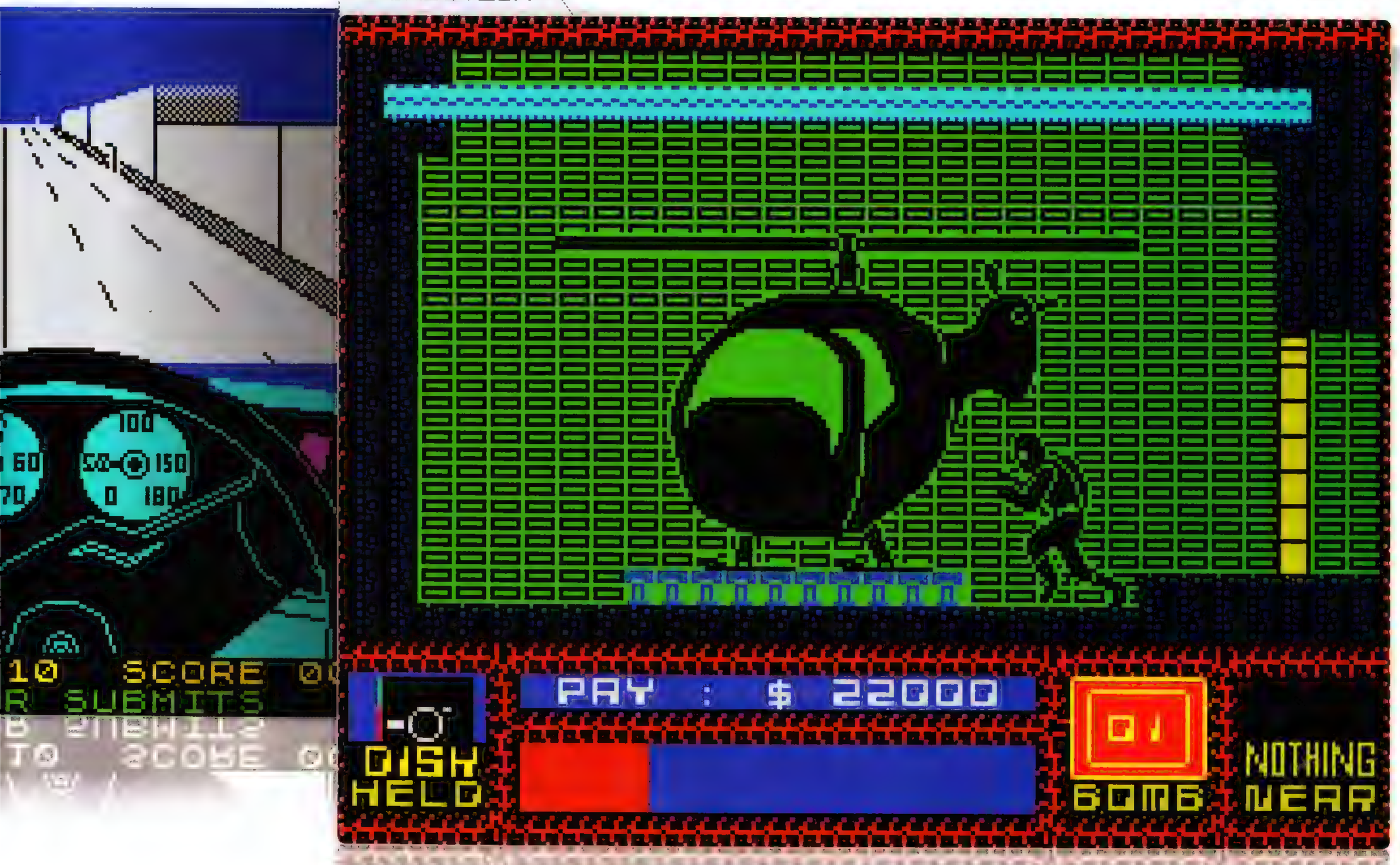
In-house programmers were on a salary, but they were also paid a royalty of 50p per game sold.

***Harrier Attack* was** bundled with the Amstrad CPC464, adding another 100,000 units to the game's already stellar sales figures.

Despite releasing games on multiple formats, the Spectrum emerged as Durell's lead platform. Robert puts this down to Mike Richardson's skill with the machine.

***Saboteur* was the** only Durell game to receive a sequel. According to Clive Townsend, it was simply down to the success of the first game.

***Turbo Esprit* is** often held up as the precursor to the *GTA* games, yet DMA Design's Mike Dailly has told us that the chief inspiration for *GTA* was the *Syndicate* games.



"I rang Robert and drove out there the same day and came home with an Oric under my arm"

RON JEFFS MAKES IT THROUGH DURELL'S STRINGENT HIRING POLICY

that he didn't have enough hands to write programs and run the company at the same time. He needed skilled staff, so he placed an advert in his local newspaper looking for machine code programmers. The ad was answered by Ron Jeffs and Mike Richardson.

"It was one of those fluke things," says Ron. "I wasn't actually looking for a job, but my wife was. So we got the local paper and were looking through the vacancies and came across Robert's advert. I rang him and drove out there the same day and came home with an Oric under my arm!" Originally hailing from Brighton, Ron was an engineer by trade and developed an interest in programming after picking up a Sinclair ZX80. He left the German company Nixdorf Computer to join Durell at the age of 46.

Mike was 20 years Ron's junior, but in similar fashion, his interest in programming was initially just a hobby. "I used to work in an aerosol factory and I studied part-time at Bristol Polytechnic," he reveals. "Eventually I got an MSc in instrumental chemical analysis, and I was still doing that when I first started with Durell."

Robert hired Mike on the strength of a quaint Spectrum game he'd written called *Jungle Trouble*. "I saw a television advert for a game, which I think must have been *Pitfall*, and the game grew from that," says Mike. "It took me about five or six months to complete, but I was only doing it part-time as I was working at the aerosol factory at the time."

Robert liked the game and later released it for the Spectrum, but before that he had a game idea of his own that he wanted his new recruits to realise.

"The original *Harrier Attack* idea was Robert's," remembers Mike. "He thought that because of the Falklands War, the Harrier had been in the news a lot, and it would be a good idea to do a game based on that. Ron did the first version of the game for the Oric and I worked on the Spectrum version. It was a big help to have the Oric game as a guide as there was no decision-making to do along the way. There were no graphics or code sharing – I looked at what Ron had done, then went and did my own thing."

Ron adds: "Robert explained his idea and it was quite primitive really. You basically took off in your plane and got shot at, and you shot back, and that was it."

Harrier Attack was a simple *Scramble* clone wearing topical trousers, but Robert was convinced that it would be a hit with gamers. He was so certain that he booked £20,000 of advertising to promote the game. "By the time *Harrier Attack* was ready for release around September 1983, I'd used pretty much all of the company's money to pay Ron and Mike to that point, so I went off and booked all this advertising with no way of paying for it! But I was 100 per cent confident that it would work out. I remember saying to

BY THE NUMBERS

29 The age of Robert White when he founded Durell in 1983.

500 The number of tape copies Robert made of his Oric assembler program. He sold them all.

5 The choice of skill levels offered to the player in *Harrier Attack*.

4 The number of Durell Spectrum games that were rated above 90% in *Crash* magazine. (The titles were *Critical Mass, Saboteur, Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* and *Thanatos*.)

0 The number of Durell Commodore 64 games that were rated above 90% in *Zzap!64*.

9 The percentage rating that *Zzap!64* awarded to the Commodore 64 version of *Turbo Esprit*. Yes, it really was that bad.

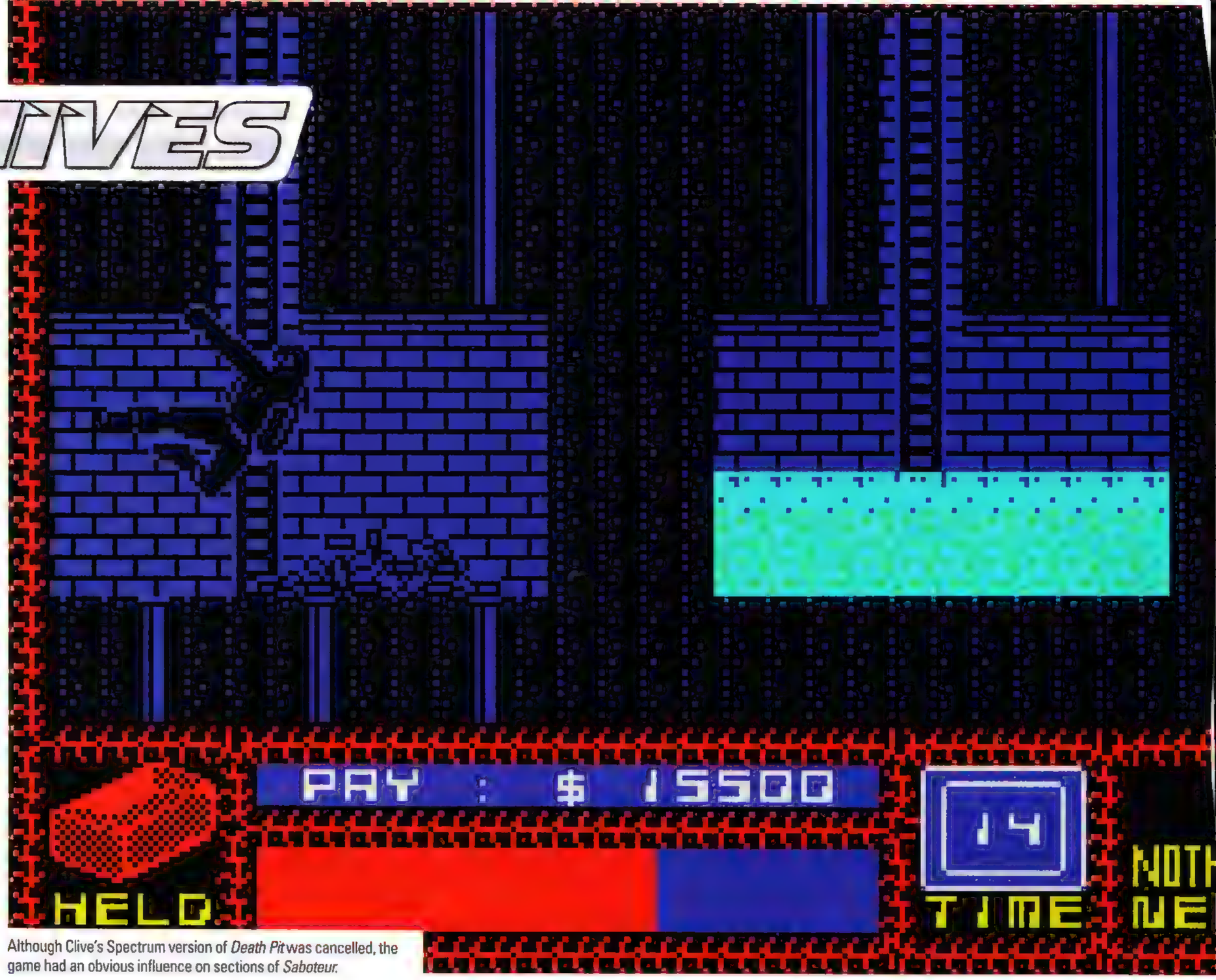
10 The number of months it took Mike Richardson to create *Turbo Esprit* for the Spectrum. This was the longest he spent on any game.

112 The number of screens in *Saboteur*. The sequel was roughly seven times bigger.

100,000 The number of copies of *Saboteur* sold on its initial release.

250,000 The number of *Harrier Attack* sales, including the copies bundled with the Amstrad CPC464.

Durell's *Scuba Dive* proved it was possible to create gripping game concepts out of almost any type of scenario. It was inspired by the team's love of diving.



Although Clive's Spectrum version of *Death Pit* was cancelled, the game had an obvious influence on sections of *Saboteur*.

my wife one day, 'I think we'll probably make £40,000 by Christmas', and in the end that's roughly what we did. In my architect role I was earning £9,000 a year, so £40,000 was a huge amount of money at the time."

"Sales had risen from 800 tapes to 20,000. Harrier Attack went on to sell 150,000 copies"

DURELL HITS THE GROUND RUNNING WITH ITS FIRST HIT

Chart attack

Sales of Durell software suddenly went bonkers. By July 1983 Robert had managed to shift 800 tapes, but by the end of the year that figure had risen to 20,000. *Harrier Attack* alone went on to sell a colossal 150,000 copies and the success of this single title funded game development for the next three years.

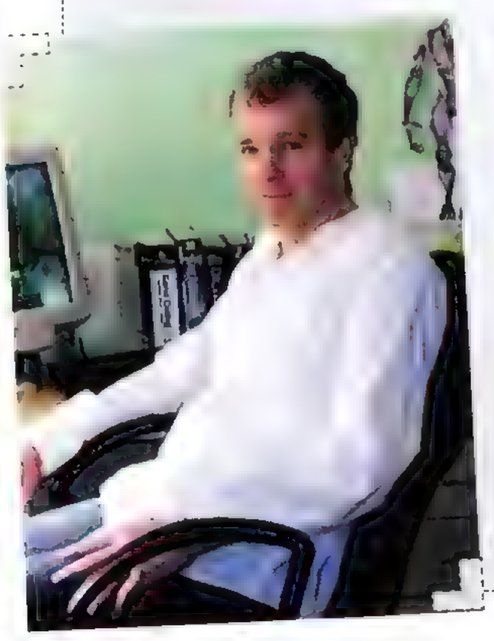
Mike devoted himself full-time to Durell and began work on underwater jaunt *Scuba Dive*. "Robert wanted us to do a *Frogger*-style game," says Mike. "We had an ideas meeting and decided to replace the frog with a diver and the obstacles with dangerous fish, and it grew from there, eventually into more of an exploration game." *Scuba Dive* was followed by *Combat Lynx*, an ambitious game that put players in control of a military attack helicopter. Although *Harrier Attack* was wildly successful, Mike wasn't about to replace the plane sprite with a chopper and be done with it. Instead, he crafted a game that was part shooter, part simulation, and featured great 3D graphics. "I always had a thing about not repeating myself," he says when asked about avoiding the easy option. "Besides, I had an idea about how to do a 3D landscape after seeing the output from a scanning electron microscope while I was doing a chemistry course."

Thanatos came after Robert's decision to leave gaming for the more stable and predictable world of business software.

Robert realised early on that for a game to be a success, it needed to appear on as many platforms as possible. Lots of conversion work was handed to Ron Jeffs, who rewrote *Scuba Dive* for the Oric and *Combat Lynx* for the Commodore 64. Ron went on to port several more games to the C64 – and not just because he was familiar with the 6502 processor, which powered both the Oric and, in modified form, the C64. "It was partly because I had a grounding in the 6502 processor, but largely because Robert simply needed someone to write versions of the games for the C64. And because Mike was so good on the Spectrum, I stepped in to do the C64 stuff. I always thought the 6502 was one of the best processors anyway. It was so simple and that made it so fast. It really put the onus on the programmer to be smart with it."

Mike turned his hand to the Amstrad CPC when it was launched in 1984 and he quickly converted *Harrier Attack* to

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Robert White
The founder of Durell Software now runs Durell Solutions out of the same office complex in Taunton. The company provides administration software to the insurance industry. "Doing games was not a lot different from what we're doing now," he says. "It's about coming up with ideas to solve problems and trying to present the solutions attractively."

Mike Richardson (pictured)
Apart from a spell when he worked with Robert on business software, Mike has been involved with games for the past 20 years. He has written games for the PC, PlayStation and 3DO, and is currently working on iPhone software. In his spare time, he is studying maths at the Open University. He also likes to mess with electronics. "For Christmas I got a PIC microcontroller programmer board kit. I haven't done any soldering for a long time so I'm looking forward to playing with that."

Clive Townsend
The *Saboteur* creator now runs Incognito Games, which has produced many titles for mobile phones, including the 2007 hit *Sonic Jump* and the official *X Factor* game. In his spare time he plays too much *FarmVille* on Facebook.

Ron Jeffs
Ron has worked with Robert since 1983. He was Durell's head of support from 1988 until 2009, and now, aged 72, he has taken on a part-time role. According to Robert, he's still a very much appreciated member of the team.

Julian Todd
For the past 17 years, Julian has used his geometric talents to write algorithms for CNC Machine Tools, based in Norwich. For fun he works on "disruptive political websites".

Nick Wilson
Nick has worked in the games industry for a number of years since he wrote *Deep Strike*, including a spell making games for Eidos. He currently runs StarByte Software, which is behind the iPhone games *Black Mamba Racing* and *NEX*.

SIX OF THE BEST

Harrier Attack
[1983]
Included not because of its importance in the history of Durell, but because it's a great little game in its own right that's perfect for quick blasts. It's probably best remembered on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, yet the Commodore 64 version comes out on top thanks to its slick graphics and decent sound effects.

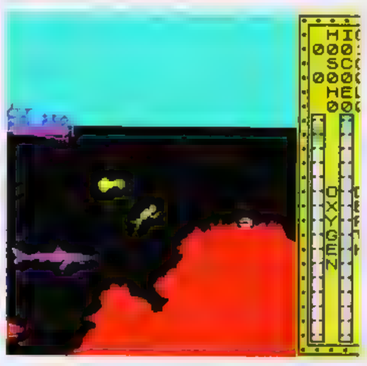
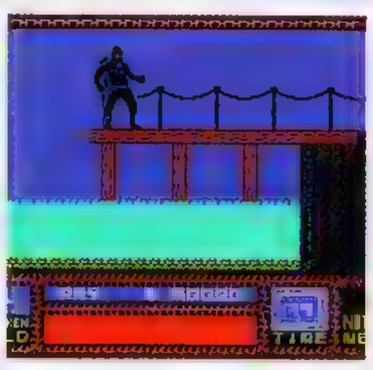
Scuba Dive
[1984]
Mike Richardson's first game of note was this cracking marine adventure, which saw the player salvaging treasure from the deep while avoiding all manner of underwater beasties. It's littered with lovely little touches, like the moving boat on the surface and the big ol' octopus guarding entry to the deeper caverns below.

Saboteur
[1985]
Yes, the game where you could kick dogs to death, but there's much more to *Saboteur* than wanton canine cruelty. The emphasis was on exploration, and discovering new areas in the huge enemy complex was perhaps more satisfying than actually completing the mission objective itself. *Saboteur* is a true 8-bit classic.

Turbo Esprit
[1986]
Widely considered to be Durell's finest release, this exceptional driving game invited you to race through 3D cities and bust drug smugglers while obeying traffic signals, pelican crossings and other rules of the road. Pretty epic – by the standards of the Spectrum, at least – and you can't say that about many 8-bit games.

Thanatos
[1986]
Durell games often featured flashy, high-tech scenarios, so this fantasy arcade game set in medieval times was a welcome change. Graphically it was amazing, particularly the main dragon sprite, but as with all of Mike Richardson's work, it was the little details about it that really stood out. A game made with obvious affection.

Saboteur II
[1987]
Subtitled *Avenging Angel*, the sequel featured a face-kicking female protagonist, which was a novel twist at the time. *Saboteur II* just about had the edge over the original – the game map was bigger and there were distinct missions that increased replay value. Plus, you could bust out of the enemy base on a red motorbike...

the new machine. The game attracted the attention of Alan Sugar, who was desperate for software to publish on his Amsoft label. The deal was done and *Harrier Attack* became one of the games bundled with the computer. "Alan is a smart businessman," says Robert. "You don't get a lot out of Alan Sugar. It was nice to shift an extra 100,000 copies through Amstrad, but he was on a very tight budget. I doubt in the end if he even paid 10p a copy. It wasn't a great deal for us, but it was a nice little extra."

For the BBC Micro, Robert looked to a couple of young programmers who had previously written games for the Acorn machine. Nick Wilson and Julian Todd were two school friends who grew up just 20 miles away from Durell's offices in Taunton. "We sold Durell one game for the BBC Micro called *Mineshaft*," says Julian, picking up the story. "Then we ported *Combat Lynx* from the Spectrum to the BBC over many weekends in Nick's bedroom. When that was done, Nick dramatically cleared his desk in the middle of the week and dropped out of school to pursue games writing full-time. Later, after attending school in Cambridge for several months, it was my turn to drop out. I rented a crummy room in a shared house in Taunton with Nick and we each worked on new games in the Durell Software attic." Nick's game was the impressive biplane shooter *Deep Strike*, while Julian was responsible for the utterly bizarre – but in a good way – *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky*.

SABOT3UR?

The full story behind the third *Saboteur* game would require an article in itself, so we'll briefly summarise the reasons why you've never had the chance to play it. The first attempt was made by Mike Richardson shortly before Durell sold its games to Elite. A design was drawn up and Mike created a bunch of sprites and even some mocked-up screens, but development ceased when the sale went through. Clive Townsend later started work on his own Spectrum sequel under the title *Saboteur 3D*. A demo was produced but Clive decided to shift development to the PC instead. The game then went through various iterations during the Nineties before being placed on the back burner around 1998, where it remained. More recently, Clive was speaking to a developer about resurrecting *Saboteur 3*, but once again it didn't work out. "Sadly the developer didn't actually set up the company as he'd planned, so nothing was ever done," reveals Clive. "I still have an extensive design document, though, so if there are any serious producers out there, they should get in touch!"

So one day we may get to play a new *Saboteur* game, and there's even a chance that Clive's *Saboteur 3D* demo for the Spectrum may surface. "I found a load of Microdrive cartridges, but none had *Saboteur 3D* on them," he says. "I'm starting to suspect that it was on a Spectrum +3 disk, so I'll have to check the loft..."

Here's a glimpse at Mike Richardson's unreleased *Saboteur 3*. This screen, and many others, were recently retrieved from Mike's old Microdrive cartridges.

New recruits

More fresh faces soon appeared. Simon Francis was a college kid who impressed Robert with a dungeon game he'd written for the Dragon 32 called *Pit Fiend*. He joined the company in early 1985 and reworked *Pit Fiend* as *Death Pit* for the Amstrad CPC, then authored the *Dune*-inspired Spectrum game *Critical Mass*.

Another new starter was budding Z80 programmer and martial arts enthusiast Clive Townsend, who happened to live on Durell's doorstep in Taunton. He hung around the offices and was initially employed as a graphics dogsbody. His first two games as a programmer – a platformer called *Chicken* and the Spectrum version of *Death Pit* – were both canned, but it was a useful learning experience as he acquired enough machine code knowledge to bring alive his 'pet project', an arcade adventure he'd named *Ninja*. "Clive had a great visual sense and one day he came in with some graphics of people who could punch and stuff," remembers Robert. "I said, 'That would make a great game, so let's come up with a storyline and put it together.'" That's exactly what they did, and the result was *Saboteur*, a solid-gold smash that went on to sell more than 100,000 copies and become Durell's second bestselling game after *Harrier Attack*.

While *Saboteur* was assailing the charts, Mike was busy fine-tuning his most ambitious project yet. "It was Robert who suggested that I should do a driving game," he says. "He wasn't very specific. It was also his idea to tie it in with Lotus." With the basic concept in place, Mike went off and created the Spectrum classic *Turbo Esprit*. Making the game's 3D cities come to life was no mean feat for Mike. "I'd just done *Combat Lynx*, so I was keen to use a similar type of 3D system. There were lots of tricks I used to get the speed up. It was all done using a lookup table so there were no 3D calculations. I really had to use every available bit in the Spectrum to do it."

Turbo Esprit sold 50,000 copies, and while it couldn't match the success of

Although extremely simple in nature, *Jungle Trouble* was a strong seller in the Spectrum's early days.

THREE TO AVOID

Saboteur Jr [1986]

Okay, so there was no actual game with this title, but we can't think of a better way of referring to the Commodore 16 version of *Saboteur.* Featuring minute graphics and dozens of samey screens, it was a sorry affair all round. At least Plus 4 owners received a version based directly on the Spectrum original.

Sigma 7 [1987]

This misguided space romp was made up of three mini challenges: a *Zaxxon*-style shooter, a *Pac-Man* maze game and a puzzle section. None were particularly bad, but they failed to hang together as a complete title. The isometric graphics were good, though, so maybe it's worth a look for that reason alone.

Chain Reaction [1987]

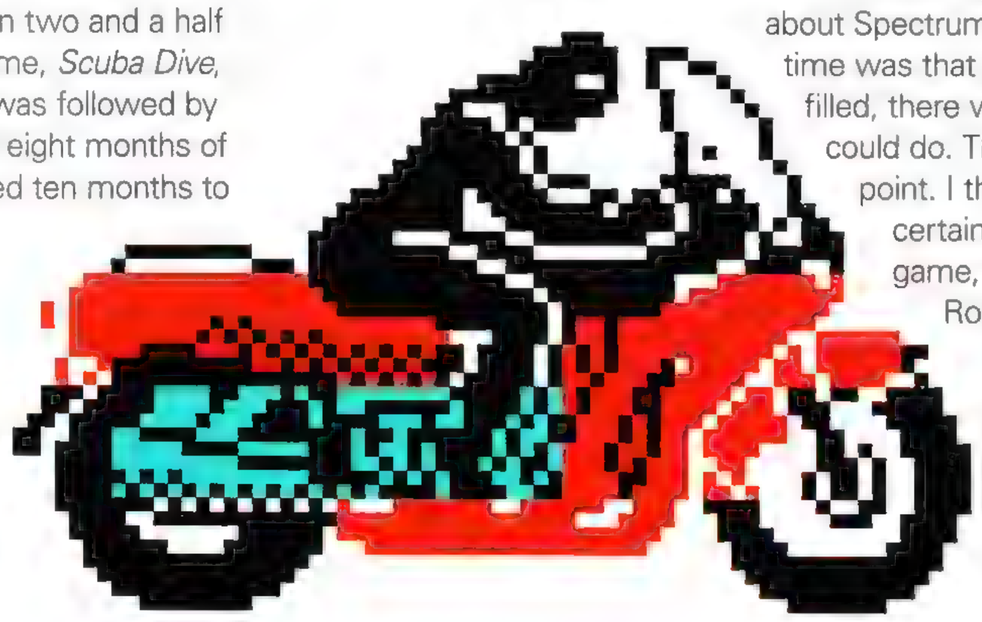
One of Durell's last releases was also one of its least impressive. Reminiscent of Ultimate's 3D games, only without the charm, *Chain Reaction* tasked you with exploring a nuclear power station and gathering up dangerous radioactive waste. Despite you racing against the clock, the gameplay was yawn-inducing.

Saboteur, it proved that the firm could still produce sizable hits in a marketplace that had become much more competitive. Yet to stay in the race, Durell had to continually strive to develop innovative new products that would stand out from the crowd. It was a challenge that the programmers appeared to relish, but it came at a cost: games were taking longer and longer to develop. Take Mike's Spectrum output, for example: he wrote the Spectrum version of *Harrier Attack* in two and a half weeks, while his next game, *Scuba Dive,* took three months. This was followed by *Combat Lynx,* which was eight months of work, and then he devoted ten months to *Turbo Esprit.*

Mike reveals that no firm deadlines were ever put in place and he never felt under pressure to get a game out the door. "Ten months was a long time, but personally I always felt that it was worth putting in as much effort as possible and would probably have resisted pressure to cut corners quite strongly. One thing about Spectrum development at that time was that once the 48K had been filled, there wasn't much more that you could do. That used to be my cut-off point. I think the lack of pressure certainly did make for a better game, although I can imagine that Robert may have been a bit anxious at times."

"By 1987, the financial rollercoaster was too scary. I just couldn't sleep at night"

ROBERT WHITE ON HIS DECISION TO GET OUT OF GAMING



Mike was correct and Robert did indeed have cause for concern. "It had become an incredibly risky business," he says. "There was increased competition and we had to keep coming up with new games, new ideas. It soon became that every game we launched was around an £80,000 gamble. Some of the games worked and some didn't, regardless of critical acclaim. For me personally, by the time we got to 1987, the financial rollercoaster was just way too scary. It got to the point where I just couldn't sleep at night, so I made the decision to move into business software."

While the company continued to put out impressive games during this period – Mike's *Thanatos* and Clive's *Saboteur II* were of particular note – Robert began parallel development of a database program aimed at the insurance industry. When between games, programmers would often get involved – Clive remembers working on the graphical interface for the application. Then, in December 1987, Robert made the shift complete by selling the rights to Durell's games to Elite Systems. Elite boss Steve Wilcox was looking to expand and viewed Durell as a decent acquisition: "We had an

TIMELINE

1983

ROBERT WHITE FOUNDS DURELL SOFTWARE IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, AND RON JEFFS AND MIKE RICHARDSON JOIN IN JUNE. BEFORE THE YEAR IS OUT, DURELL RELEASES SEVERAL GAMES INCLUDING *GALAXY 5* (ORIC), *JUNGLE TROUBLE* (SPECTRUM) AND *HARRIER ATTACK* (ORIC AND SPECTRUM).

1984

DURELL KICKS OFF THE YEAR WITH *SCUBA DIVE* (ORIGINALLY FOR THE SPECTRUM, WITH ORIC AND COMMODORE 64 VERSIONS FOLLOWING), AND ENDS IT WITH *COMBAT LYNX* (AGAIN, WRITTEN FOR THE SPECTRUM BUT PORTED TO OTHER PLATFORMS). THE COMPANY ALSO RELEASES ITS FIRST BBC MICRO GAME, THE *MANIC MINER* VARIANT *MINESHAFT. HARRIER ATTACK* IS BUNDLED WITH THE NEW AMSTRAD CPC COMPUTER

1985

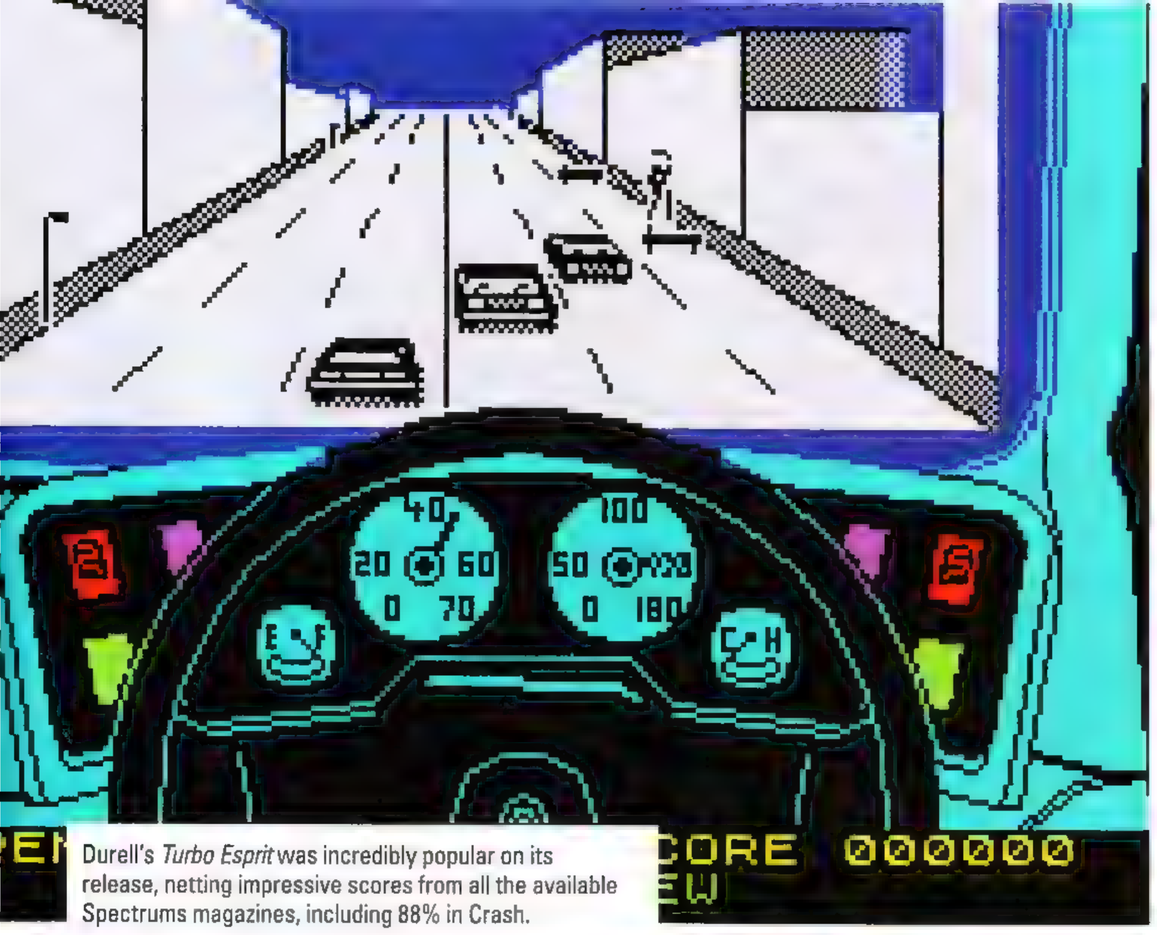
SIMON FRANCIS AND CLIVE TOWNSEND JOIN THE COMPANY. SIMON WRITES *DEATH PIT* FOR THE AMSTRAD CPC AND *CRITICAL MASS* FOR THE SPECTRUM. WHILE CLIVE CODES *SABOTEUR* FOR THE SPECTRUM.

1986

DURELL RELEASES TWO SPECTRUM GAMES BY MIKE RICHARDSON: *TURBO ESPRIT* AND *THANATOS.* FORMER DURELL FREELANCERS NICK WILSON AND JULIAN TODD ARE ADDED TO THE PAYROLL AND THEY AUTHOR *DEEP STRIKE* AND *FAT WORM BLOWS A SPARKY* RESPECTIVELY. THE DURELL *BIG 4* COMPILATION IS RELEASED, FEATURING *COMBAT LYNX, CRITICAL MASS, SABOTEUR* AND *TURBO ESPRIT.*

1987

SIGMA 7, SABOTEUR II AND *CHAIN REACTION* ARE RELEASED. DURELL DEVELOPS ITS FIRST DATABASE PROGRAM (INSURANCE MASTER). AT THE END OF THE YEAR, DURELL SELLS ITS BACK CATALOGUE OF GAMES TO ELITE SYSTEMS AND CONCENTRATES SOLELY ON BUSINESS SOFTWARE



Durell's *Turbo Esprit* was incredibly popular on its release, netting impressive scores from all the available Spectrums magazines, including 88% in Crash.

Clive Townsend being manhandled by a ninja in this memorable photo, which appeared in *Crash* magazine.

Ron Jeffs's *Harrier Attack* started off on Oric, before finding success on other 8-bits.

Robert White (right) shows Mike Richardson the capabilities of his Oric computer.

acquaintance with Robert and were keen to continue to grow our business, including our budget and compilation business. We had no significant regrets about the deal we did for the Durell catalogue and would probably have done it again if we had our time over."

With the games gone, Robert spent the next two years developing his Insurance Master program. The bold move to stabilise the company paid off and it continues to trade to this day under the name Durell Solutions. "We're still developing and selling insurance software, 20 years on. It doesn't make a lot of money, but it never makes a loss. I've kept a lot of people employed for a long time and I feel quite good about that."

Looking back

Durell has now been around for 27 years, and while only the first four years focused on gaming software, the place holds happy memories for those ambitious young programmers who plied their trade in sleepy Somerset. "They were the best years of my working life," says Mike Richardson. "There's no feeling like finding you're good at something, seeing your work on shop shelves, getting amazing feedback from people enjoying your work, and getting paid well for it as a bonus."

Saboteur creator Clive Townsend, who now runs mobile developer Incognito Games, remembers his coding colleagues with fondness: "I think we were all sad when Durell stopped making games, but I'm proud to have worked with such a talented bunch of people. Robert was brilliant. It was a very relaxed atmosphere, and as we didn't actually have design specs for our games, we didn't really have deadlines either! Many of the game designs grew organically, which meant they were finished when they were finished. I've had lots of fun in the industry since, but often big business and red tape can get in the way of creative development. If only more bosses were like Robert."

Julian Todd of *Fat Worm* fame also remembers Robert as a decent and honourable boss: "He barely interfered. Today I do a little bit of management of programmers, and I know it is impossible to hassle them, as you simply annoy them and yourself. Being relaxed is pretty much your only option, whether you like it or not. I would like to meet Robert again now that I have experienced the other side of business. I am fascinated that he pulled it off and made a living out of us kids. He paid 50p per copy sold, and I got cheques totalling several thousand pounds, so he was very honest. He could easily have not paid me anything."

Robert himself feels that it's important to look forward more than back, yet there are reminders of his firm's gaming legacy all around him. Cover art from various Durell hits adorns the office walls, he keeps in regular touch with many of his old employees – indeed, Ron Jeffs still works with him – and the £100 he used to buy that first Oric is still there on the company balance sheet. Above all that, Durell's games are still remembered and revered by too many people to ever let them fade into obscurity. "I think at Durell we had a lot of really original ideas," he acknowledges, then regales us with a fitting tale. "Just yesterday I was on site talking to a potential customer and he said, 'You're not the Durell who wrote *Harrier Attack*, are you?' And I replied, 'Yeah, that was us', and then his partner came in and piped up, '*Saboteur*! That was a great game!' So yes, it's still a lot of fun. I guess people have fond memories of our games, and I do too."

HARRIER DOWN

When **RG** interviewed Mike Richardson about *Turbo Esprit* in issue 36, he revealed that he'd formed a new company called Durell Games and was working on *Harrier Attack II* for the PC. The game, which married the classic 2D gameplay of the original with slick 3D visuals, was made available to download in October 2007 after three years in development. It bombed.

"It was a complete disaster," says Mike. "I think I sold something like six copies. I try not to think about it too much. The main thing I learnt was not to try it again. Before I did *Harrier Attack II* I would hear other programmers saying how it was possible for a game to sell millions or none at all, and I didn't believe it. How is it possible to sell nothing of anything? Now I know I can do it."

After that harsh lesson, Mike went on to work for Electronic Arts, helping out on the PC versions of *Burnout Paradise* and the latest *Harry Potter* game. He has since joined up with his former Durell colleague Nick Wilson at iPod/iPhone game developer StarByte Software. His current project is a racing game called *Black Mamba 3D*.

The stunning *Thanatos* remains one of Durell's best Spectrum games.

The Collector's Guide

SINCLAIR ZX

Interested in collecting for Sir Clive Sinclair's awesome 8-bit computer? Then the following guide is exactly what you need

» **Manufacturer:** Sinclair Research » **Models:** 16K/48K/128/+2/+3 » **Launched:** 1982 » **Country of origin:** UK

SPECTRUM

The Collector's Guide

» Even Spectrum magazines are collectable, and they're a rich source of information about little-known games.

» No Spectrum software collection would be complete without at least a few of Ultimate's classy titles.

"...the quality of the colour display is excellent".
"The graphics facilities are great fun".
"...the Spectrum is way ahead of its competitors".

"The world's best personal computer for under £500."

Sinclair ZX Spectrum
16K RAM £125, 48K RAM £175.

sinclair
ZX Spectrum

» The Spectrum was reasonably priced on its release and that holds true today.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Sinclair republished Ultimate's first four releases – *Jetpac*, *Pssst*, *Tranz Am* and *Cookie* – on ROM cartridge and later released them as part of its silver-labelled tape range too. However, the tape version of *Tranz Am* was seemingly never released, despite being reserved a spine code (G29/S). So why would Sinclair release the other three games but not this one? Well, one theory is that *Tranz Am* was actually released! We've spoken to a reputable collector who swears blind that he saw a copy back in the day. Maybe a copy is out there. Maybe you'll be the lucky one to find it...

WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

In its lifetime the Spectrum was the inexpensive computer that was accessible to everyone. Now, for a collector, it is much the same. Hardware and software is in abundance, and with very little outlay you can pick up a working machine and a ton of software. On eBay right now, for around a fiver, you could buy enough copies of Sinclair-published titles like *Computer Scrabble* and *Make-A-Chip* to construct a habitable dwelling. But it's not just a case of collecting for the sake of it, or because you owned or played a Spectrum in your youth. There are several very good reasons why it's a great platform to start collecting for.

First off, the original rubber-keyed model really is a thing of beauty. Thanks to its diminutive and distinctive design, it still looks lovely, and you can't honestly say that about many of its boring beige rivals. If you're a collector of 8-bit computers then the original Spectrum just has to be in your possession. It's a design classic.

If you have a Spectrum on your wanted list then the good news is that you'll have no problem picking one up second-hand. The later 48K models, with the blue-coloured keys, are in abundance, and working examples can be picked up at a reasonable price. (Note that a common fault with the original design is a broken keyboard membrane, resulting in one or more keys refusing to work, but this fault is easy to fix – see **www.rwapsoftware.co.uk** for more details.) For the more serious collector there's always the rarer issue 1 version, which includes either 16 or 48K of RAM and is easily identifiable thanks to its lighter, grey-coloured keys. In addition, the lower the serial number, the more valuable the machine as enthusiasts look to acquire one of the first Speccys to have rolled off the production line. There was a memorable case on eBay a while back where a buyer won an issue 1 Spectrum for £97 and then sold the same machine a couple of weeks later for £332. The reason for this healthy profit? The canny buyer noticed that the machine he'd bought had the very low serial number 001-000184 and drew attention to this fact in his listing, thereby increasing interest and driving up the final price.

Also coveted by collectors is the Spectrum 128 computer. It may not be as easy on the eye as the original, thanks to it adopting the comparatively ugly keyboard and casing style introduced with the Sinclair QL, but it has resonance with fans as it was the last true Sinclair Spectrum to be released before Amstrad took over the operation. And speaking of Amstrad, the later +2 and +3 models, with their respective tape and disk drives, are also worth considering if you're looking for a quick and easy way of loading software and would like a Speccy with a proper keyboard.

So there are a variety of models available to suit both your budget and collecting needs. And once you have the hardware, you have access to the platform's vast software library. It's loaded with gems, including some fantastic exclusives like *Back To Skool*, *Deathchase*, *Avalon* and *Chaos*. Then there are the classic titles that began life on the Spectrum before being ported across to other machines, such as *Manic*

» Here's the unusual double-case release of International Matchday. The game typically shipped in a small single-case.

Miner, Ant Attack, The Lords Of Midnight, Turbo Esprit and *Head Over Heels*. The machine is also home to some fine coin-op conversions including *Bomb Jack, Chase HQ, Rainbow Islands, Renegade* and *R-Type*. There's a ton of top licensed stuff too, like *The Trap Door, Dan Dare, Tai-Pan, Cobra* and *The Great Escape*.

Beyond acquiring the best games, or the ones you remember from way back when, there are some nice mini-collections to aim for. An excellent one is the range of early games published by Sinclair that sported the iconic colour 'flash' motif. Most also featured striking inlay art. There were 38 cassette titles, plus a further ten on cartridge, making a rather fitting 48 in total. The carts are particularly collectable and command decent prices, as they were the only games released for Sinclair's Interface 2 add-on. Of the ten, the four from Ultimate are the most sought after.

Which brings us nicely to Ultimate and its Spectrum legacy. The renowned software house released games for most 8-bit computers, but the Spectrum was always its primary platform. There were 17 individual Spectrum titles in total, making it a very realistic collection target, although a few of the later titles, like *Martianoids* and *Bubbler*, are not as common so you'll need to fork out for them. It's surely worth it, as a complete Ultimate collection is a wonderful sight, with the impressive big box releases like *Sabre Wulf, Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* forming the centrepiece. And to finish off the collection in style there's one final thing you need to add, but more on that in a few pages...

Ultimate sadly never released any games that took advantage of the Spectrum 128's extra capabilities, but a number of developers did and some of the early 128K-only games are attractive to collectors. You'll certainly see more interest around the 128K versions of *Ghostbusters* or *Three Weeks In Paradise* than the standard 48K releases. The same goes for +3 disk versions. Most software houses put games out on disk, but in the vast majority of cases they were exactly the same as the tapes, only with less painful loading times. There were a few exceptions, however. *North & South, Shadow Of The Beast, Golden Axe* and various Level 9 adventures all featured elements that were exclusive to the disk version. Magnetic Scrolls went one further and ditched tape completely for all of its Spectrum games bar *The Pawn*, so classic adventures like *The Guild Of Thieves* and *Jinxter* are only available on disk.

One of the greatest joys of collecting Spectrum software is that you never really know what you might find. If you were to take a chance on a closed box full of games you'll probably find all of the usual suspects like *Horace Goes Skiing* and *RoboCop*, but lurking at the bottom might be that Ultimate game you've been searching for. Or, just maybe, there might be a super-rare, possibly self-published title that has yet to be archived at the awesome World of Spectrum (**www.worldofspectrum.org**). The website currently holds details on more than 10,000 games, yet that number includes around 1,000 that are thought to exist but have yet to be found in the wild. If even more people start collecting for the Spectrum then maybe, collectively, we can fill in all the gaps. Happy hunting.

THE PERIPHERALS

» Microdrives have a deserved reputation for unreliability, but in 1983 they were a cost-effective method of saving data.

» Sinclair advertising supplements like this one provide an interesting look back into gaming's past, plugging all the latest games and peripherals.

ZX INTERFACE 1 & 2

To keep costs down, the original Spectrum was rather sparse around the back; there was no standard serial connector, joystick port or cartridge slot. Besides the TV and tape sockets, there was just an exposed edge of the motherboard to which various peripherals could be connected. But this was all part of Sinclair's grand plan, as in 1983 the company released the ZX Interface 1 and 2. These official add-ons were designed to make the Spectrum complete.

Sitting snugly beneath the computer, the Interface 1 peripheral was a real box of tricks. It provided the user with an RS232 serial connector for plugging in external devices like printers and modems, and a network connector for creating a LAN of up to 64 Speccys, presumably in a bid to get the computer into more classrooms. But the interface's real draw was that it enabled you to connect up to eight of Sinclair's Microdrive storage units.

Using cassette tapes to load and save data was slow, yet speedy random-access disk drives were prohibitively expensive, so the idea of a small and relatively cheap tape-loop cartridge system seemed like a typically astute Sinclair solution. Sadly, the device suffered from months of delays and when it was eventually released, users discovered that the tape in the cartridges could easily stretch or snap, thereby destroying precious data. It was also revealed that if the Spectrum crashed when writing to a cartridge the Microdrive would continue to whirl away and erase all of the data. So the reliability of the system was far from sound, yet the cartridges were cheap, so all the user had to do was make additional backups to one – okay, maybe two – further carts to safeguard against data loss.

Shortly after the release of the Interface 1 and Microdrive, Sinclair unveiled its second add-on. The Interface 2 was a much simpler affair aimed at the Spectrum's swelling number of gamers. It featured twin joystick ports and a slot for plugging in ROM cartridges, effectively turning the computer into a plug-and-play console. Being able to connect two joysticks was a great idea and gave it an edge over competing joystick interfaces offered by the likes of Kempston and Fuller, but the cartridge slot was only able to deal with software up to 16K in size, thereby ruling out the vast majority of games designed for the 48K Spectrum. The ROM carts were expensive too, at two to three times more than the equivalent cassette version. Punters weren't prepared to pay the extra just to cut out a few minutes of loading time.

At the time of their release, neither interface could be described as a must-have, as there were third-party peripherals available that would probably suit your expansion needs better. But now, for the Sinclair enthusiast, these iconic add-ons are compulsory parts of any Spectrum hardware collection. Key to their appeal is that they perfectly complement the design of the original rubber-keyed computer, so when all of the official components are hooked up together, it really looks the business.

...AND THE REST

01. Kempston Joystick Interface

Every serious Speccy gamer needed a joystick, and in the early days there were several competing standards. The Kempston interface quickly emerged as the most popular and was supported by many commercial games. Once you had the interface, you just needed to add a Competition Pro or Zip Stick and you were away.

02. Multiface 3

This amazing device needs little introduction. Romantic Robot released several Multifaces over the Spectrum's lifetime, but it was this version, specifically designed for the +3, that was indispensable. With a touch of the magic red button you could back up your tape games to disk and more besides. Absolute bliss.

03. Fuller Box

While Spectrum 'beeper' sound has a certain charm, it was one area where the machine was lacking. The Fuller Box addressed this problem by including an AY-3-8912 sound chip – the same one that was later used in the Spectrum 128. It could be programmed by the user and was supported by several games.

04. Currah MicroSpeech

Make your Spectrum swear! This speech synthesiser was surprisingly popular, even though it was only fun for about five minutes. A decent number of commercial games supported the unit, including *Lunar Jetman* and *Hunchback*. Curiously, if you loaded *Booty* with it plugged in you'd get to play a hidden game.

05. Opus Discovery

There were a number of disk interfaces – Beta, Disciple, etc – that let you hook up a standard disk drive to a Spectrum. The Opus was an all-in-one solution that provided the user with one or two 3.5-inch drives, plus various ports and connectors. It was a high-quality, if expensive, piece of kit.

06. Magnum Light Phaser

Several lightguns were released for the Spectrum over the years, but this Sinclair-branded effort had the most impact, as it was bundled with the Spectrum +2 Action Pack. Amstrad also ensured that there was software to support it, including games such as *Operation Wolf* and *The Living Daylights*.

07. Saga Keyboard

A lot of people love the Speccy's rubber keys, but from a practical viewpoint only a sadist would want to prod them for any length of time. As with the ZX81 before it, third-party manufacturers like Saga and dk'tronics released replacement keyboards that screwed directly into the machine's casing, allowing relatively pain-free extended use.

The Collector's Guide

TOP 5 GAMES TO PLAY

Dynamite Dan

■ Despite being overshadowed by *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, *Dynamite Dan* was an aural and visual explosion of colour and sound that was chock full of nice touches. Tremendously playable and highly addictive.

Nodes Of Yesod

■ Yes, it's a bit like *Underwurlde*, but Odin's homage to Ultimate stands the test of time. With exploring, dodging the red spaceman and hunting for hidden rooms, *Nodes* was arguably more gratifying than *Underwurlde*.

Starquake

■ Stephen Crowe's arcade adventure was another game presented in the style of Ultimate. Yet it was easy to see why *Starquake* was considered better than many of the games it seemed intent on imitating.

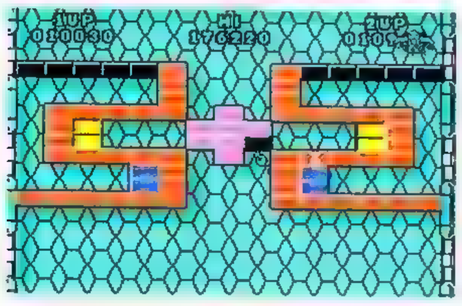
Dun Darach

■ This complex and testing graphic adventure from Gargoyle Games introduced great character interaction, making for a more immersive and atmospheric game than its predecessor, *Tir Na Nog*.

Cybernoid

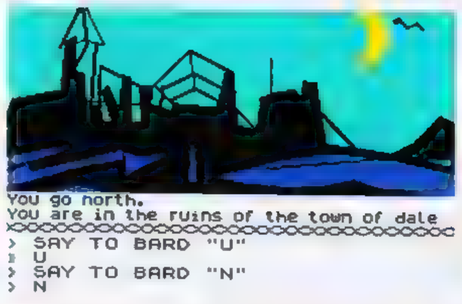
■ *Cybernoid* wasn't a particularly original concept, but Raffaele Cecco's attention to detail, wonderful graphics and fast gameplay made for a game that you just couldn't put down.

PLAY THESE NEXT



Batty

■ Despite starting out life as a freebie cover tape, *Batty* was the *Breakout* clone that topped them all. *Arkanoid* had been released earlier and the similarities were obvious – ingenious power-ups, aliens, etc – but what propelled *Batty* to the fore was the fantastic simultaneous co-operative two-player mode.

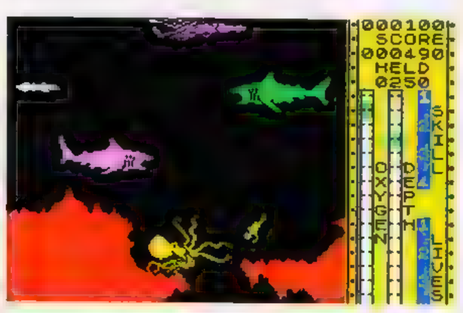


The Hobbit

■ *The Hobbit* was, for many Spectrum owners, their first experience of adventuring. With a story everyone knew, puzzles that weren't too cryptic to be unsolvable and a decent parser, *The Hobbit* remains a nostalgic favourite, even for those gamers who don't usually dabble with text adventures. Wait. Wait. Time passes...

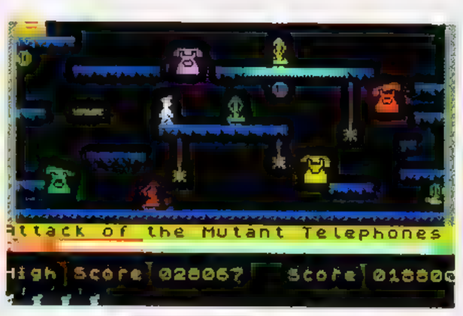
Skool Daze

■ Microsphere's game was a triumph for originality and gameplay. As Eric you must steal your school report from the headmaster's safe by obtaining code letters from teachers, and to get these letters you have to knock them senseless with your catapult. Impish school kids across the land loved *Skool Daze*.



Scuba Dive

■ Durell Software's golden oldie is one that really hits the nostalgia spot. Whether it's the menagerie of sea life, getting lost looking for treasure and running out of air in the bewildering tunnels, or trying to creep past that giant octopus, it was always worth a play. Simple Spectrum gaming but executed brilliantly.



Manic Miner

■ Pixel-perfect jumping, 20 extraordinarily well-designed screens, inventive sprites, and all wrapped in a quirky sense of humour. It had a perfectly weighted learning curve that just egged you on to have one more go. *Manic Miner* was often copied but rarely surpassed as king of the Spectrum platform game.

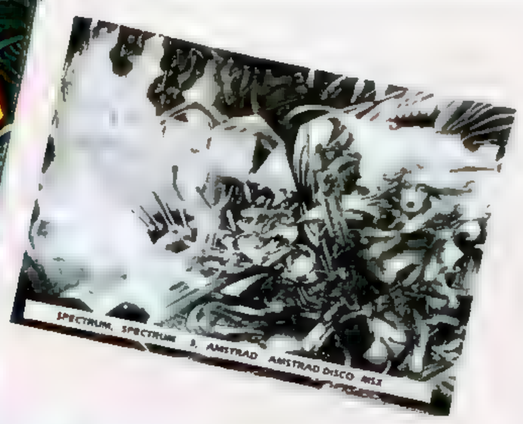
TOP 5 IMPORT GAMES

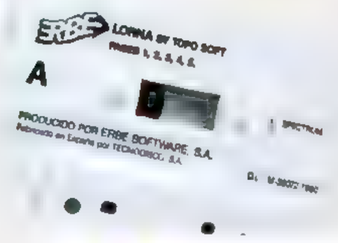
El Capitan Trueno

■ A side-scrolling arcade adventure of two parts. Being released by Dinamic it has all the usual hallmarks of that company's output: lovely graphics with great gameplay but also a hugely testing learning curve. Persevere with it.

Lorna

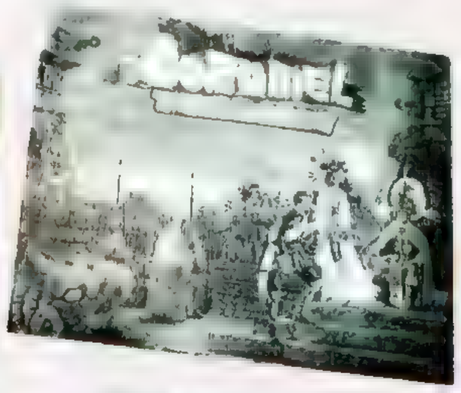
■ *Lorna* by Topo Soft was based on the creation of Spanish comic book artist Alfonso Azpiri. This was a side-scrolling beat-'em-up intermingled with *Deathchase*-style levels and proved to be immensely playable.





Cozumel

■ An illustrated text adventure from Aventuras AD, *Cozumel* was the first in the *Ci-U-Than Trilogy*, all of which were quite superb. You play as an archaeologist, and you've been shipwrecked and lost everything.



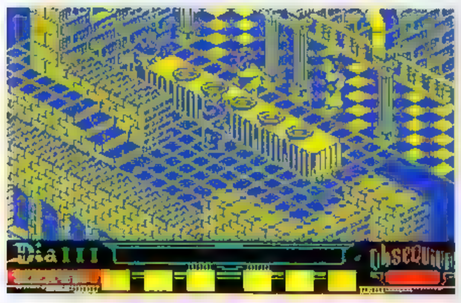
Satan

■ A game of two parts; the first sees you play a platform-jumping barbarian and by the second as a wizard with all the accoutrements required to give Satan a thrashing. Great monochrome graphics combine with Dinamic's typically hard gameplay.

Soviet

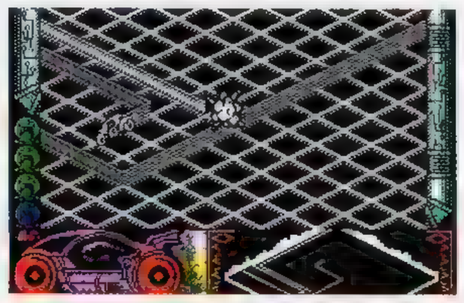
■ This top-down shoot-'em-up from Opera Soft sees you in control of a Soviet tank exploring the cities of Vilnius and Baku, searching for hostages while fending off endless waves of enemies. Sounds dull, plays great.

IMPORT THESE NEXT



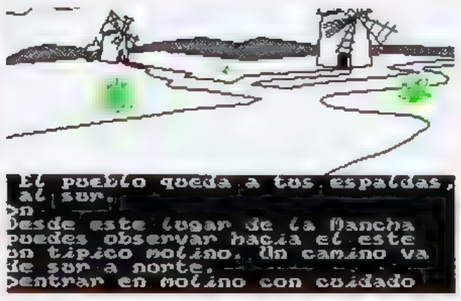
La Abadia Del Crimen

■ Umberto Eco's novel *The Name Of The Rose* appears on the Spectrum, but having not gained Eco's backing it was renamed *La Abadia Del Crimen* (*The Abbey Of Crime*). This isometric arcade adventure from Opera Soft was a great medieval whodunnit in which you solve the puzzles but must also obey abbey rules.



Zona 0

■ If the light bikes in *Tron* are your thing then you would love this 3D rendition of the game. A simple concept made better with the addition of the isometric graphical perspective, but it maintains the obligatory 'one more go' compulsion of the original 2D release. Released in Spain by Topo Soft.

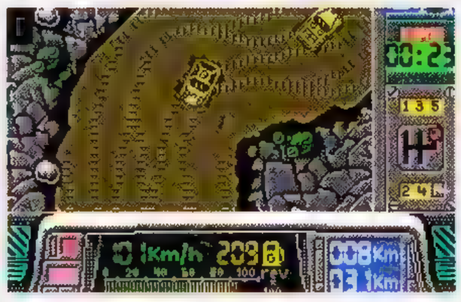


Don Quijote

■ Dinamic's graphic adventure based on Miguel de Cervantes' books from the 17th Century, *Don Quijote* is the story of a man so obsessed with chivalry that he becomes unhinged and sets off on make-believe adventures. Written using Incentive's Graphic Adventure Creator, this adventure is hugely popular in Spain and deservedly so.

Mortadelo Y Filemon II

■ The Spanish certainly like their comic book adaptations, don't they? *Mortadelo Y Filemon II*, based on Francisco Ibáñez's series, was released by Dro Soft and is a very playable scrolling platform game played over two distinct levels, both of which contain some splendidly colourful and well-defined graphics.



Paris-Dakar

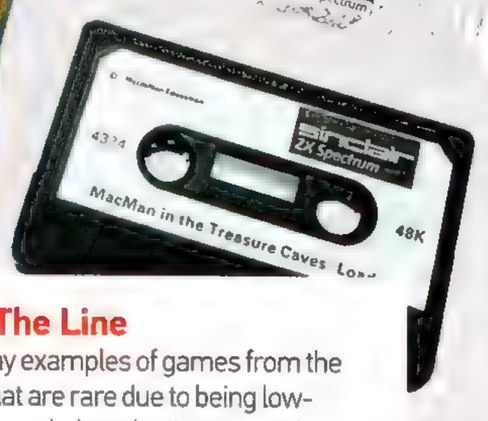
■ Zigurat's hugely popular racing game sees you in control of a rally car across three levels. You must also maintain your vehicle by purchasing refurbishments. With a low starting budget and big outgoings, you must also race well to gain sponsorship and the money required for your ongoing repairs.

The Collector's Guide

TOP 5 RAREST PAL GAMES

MacMan In The Treasure Caves

■ There were four *MacMan* titles released by Macmillan in total, and any one of them could have featured as they're all insanely difficult to find. Two things made the *MacMan* games the rarities they are: they sold poorly and they're educational games.



Ship Of The Line

■ There are many examples of games from the formative days that are rare due to being low-volume bedroom-coded productions; even the bigger companies had to start somewhere. Case in point: Richard Shepherd Software with the entirely homemade release of *Ship Of The Line*, including handmade inlay and home-dubbed TDK tape.

Dalek Attack

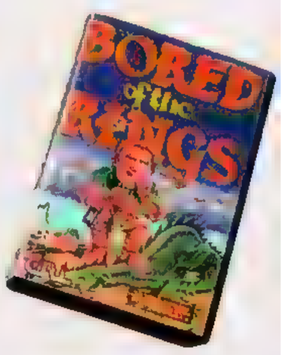
■ Alternative's game is generally regarded as one of the last full-price Spectrum releases and the last licensed game on the system. This side-scrolling platformer sees you play the Doctor in the Sylvester McCoy regeneration, and the game is much like McCoy's Doctor: instantly forgettable. At least you got a Dalek sticker...

RoboCop 3

■ Ocean's third *RoboCop* game suffered a similar fate to US Gold's third *Indy* game: that of being released in a time when the Spectrum was becoming commercially unviable. It was a reasonably good game but not a patch on the first two *RoboCop* games.

Bored Of The Rings

■ Some games have a very nomadic life. *Bored Of The Rings* has been released by Delta 4, GI Games and Zenobi. CRL then published it for just a couple of months before Silversoft took it on. While common on the Silversoft label, the CRL and Delta 4 variants are very rare.



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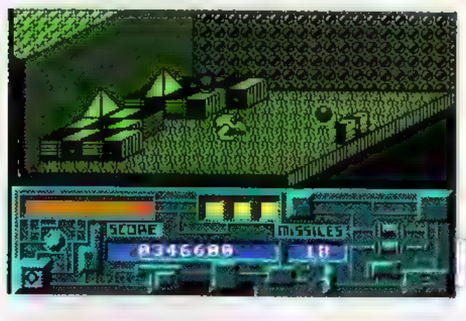


Ballbreaker II

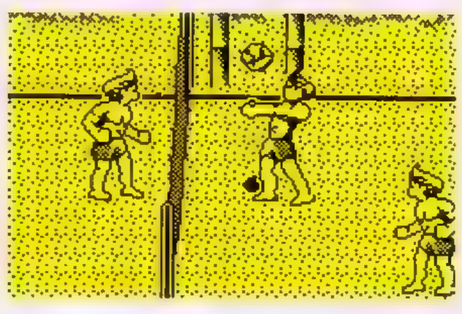
■ Another CRL rarity, but this one is entirely down to poor sales due to its banality. The sequel to *Ballbreaker*, an isometric *Breakout* clone that hardly set the world alight itself, suffered from brain-numbing slowness and a dodgy isometric perspective. Strictly for the collecting completists only...

Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis

■ The third and final instalment of US Gold's *Indiana Jones* trilogy of games arrived in 1992, well into the twilight years of the Spectrum. Despite playing well, it sold in such disappointing numbers that its status as an instant collectable and rarity was virtually assured.

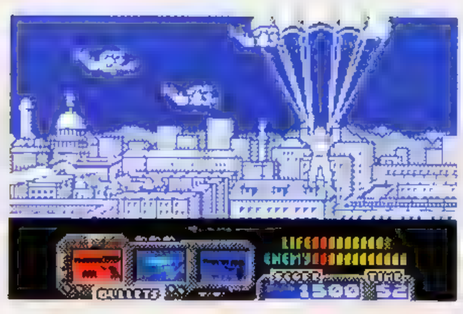
Specvaders

■ Hewson's *Specvaders* was released early in 1983 amid an avalanche of *Space Invaders* clones. Despite the choice, no one game stood out and dominated the sales. Sadly, *Specvaders* was largely anonymous and not helped by uninspired visuals and poor sales. Finding a copy will cost you a pretty penny. Just ask Steve Brown...



Beach Volley

■ You would think that a game touting sand, sun and ball games with scantily clad beautiful people sounds like a cracking afternoon's entertainment. Released by Ocean in the depths of winter 1989, it barely registered in the sales department. Once again, commercial failure triumphs in creating a collectable.



Sly Spy: Secret Agent

■ While the re-release of *Sly Spy: Secret Agent* is as common as muck, the original Ocean release is a real tough one to locate. Quite why that should be is anyone's guess, as it was a great game and actually sold reasonably well; certainly well enough to warrant resurrecting it for the budget release treatment.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

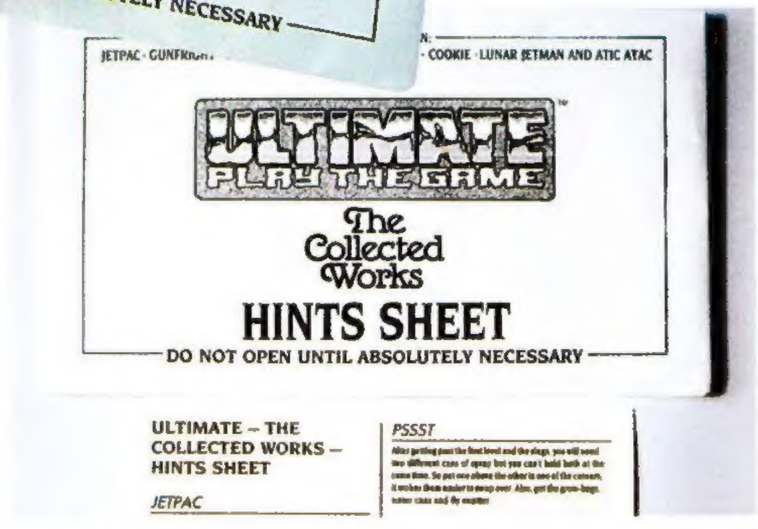
What? A Spectrum collecting feature without an Ultimate title? Well, why have one when you can have almost the entire back catalogue on disk in one glossy package? Desirable and collectable in equal measure, it's the ultimate compilation...

The games

■ Encompassing virtually all of Ultimate's Spectrum output bar those licensed to US Gold and *Underwurlde*, which was left out due to compatibility issues, this 11-game compilation was a must-have. From the early days of *Jetpac* through to the isometric magic of *Knight Lore* and beyond, there's not a dud game in the box.

The map

■ Frequently missing from the box when bought today, the map of Ultimatum was a previously unreleased illustration by the artistic Tim Stamper. Quite what its purpose was other than to brighten up your bedroom wall is unclear, but that unmistakable Ultimate style made it something to covet by default.



Pushing the envelope

■ The sealed envelope containing the hints sheet is the bane of the collector, as it's a perpetual absentee from *The Collected Works* nowadays. A leaflet containing highlights of a memorable interview with Tim and Chris Stamper conducted by Roger Kean of Newsfield's *Crash* magazine isn't always present either.

Special thanks to 'WoSers' Jarrod Bentley, Andy Startin-Bailey, Craig Stevenson, Tony Barnett, Albert Valls, José Manuel, Bernardo Iborra and Steve Brown for their invaluable help with the feature.

The Collector's Guide

THE SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

- 180
- 3D Starstrike
- Abadia Del Crimen, La
- Academy
- Ad Astra
- Airwolf
- Alien 8
- Alien Highway
- Alien Syndrome
- Android 2
- Antics
- Ant Attack
- Arcadia
- Arc Of Yesod
- Arkanoid 2: Revenge Of Doh
- Astro Marine Corps
- Atic Atac
- Back To Skool
- Barbarian
- Bard's Tale, The
- Barry McGuigan's World Championship Boxing
- Batman
- Batman: The Caped Crusader
- Batty
- Bionic Commando
- Bomb Jack
- Booty
- Boulder Dash
- Bounder
- Bounty Bob Strikes Back
- Brian Bloodaxe
- Bruce Lee
- Bubble Bobble
- Bugaboo (The Flea)
- Cabal
- Captain Blood
- Capitan Trueno, El
- Castle Master
- Cauldron
- Cavelon
- Carrier Command
- Chaos
- Chase HQ
- Chuckie Egg
- Cobra
- Codename Mat
- Combat Lynx

Deathchase

Feud

- Combat School
- Commando
- Confuzion
- Cybernoid
- Cybernoid 2: The Revenge
- Cyclone
- Daley Thompson's Decathlon
- Dan Dare
- Dark Side
- Dark Star
- Deathchase
- Deflektor
- Deus Ex Machina
- Dizzy
- Don Quijote
- Doomdark's Revenge
- Draconus
- Dragontorc
- Driller
- Druid
- Dun Darach
- Dustin
- Dynamite Dan
- Dynamite Dan 2
- Elevator Action
- Elite
- Enduro Racer
- Enigma Force
- Exolon
- Fall Guy, The
- Fairlight
- Fantastic Voyage
- Fantasy World Dizzy
- Fat Worm Blows A Sparky
- Feud
- Firefly
- Flying Shark
- Football Director
- Football Manager
- Footballer Of The Year
- Frankie Goes To Hollywood
- Full Throttle
- Gauntlet
- Ghost'N Goblins
- Glider Rider
- Great Escape, The
- Green Beret
- Gunfright

- Gryzor
- Gyron
- Gyroscope
- Hall Of The Things
- Harvey Headbanger
- Head Over Heels
- Heartland
- Heavy On The Magick
- Helter Skelter
- Herbert's Dummy Run
- Highway Encounter
- Hobbit, The
- Horace Goes Skiing
- Hydrofool
- Hysteria
- Hypersports
- Ice Breaker
- Ikari Warriors
- Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis

Match Day II

- Into The Eagle's Nest
- Jack The Nipper
- Jetpac
- Jet Set Willy
- Jinxter
- Joe Blade II
- Knight Lore
- Knight Tyme
- Kokotoni Wilf
- Kwik Snax
- Laser Squad
- Leaderboard
- Lemmings
- Lords Of Midnight, The
- Manic Miner
- Marsport
- Match Day II
- Maziacs
- Mercenary
- Midnight Resistance
- Mikie
- Monty On The Run
- Movie
- Mugsy
- Myth: History In The Making
- Nebulus
- New Zealand Story, The
- Night Shift
- North & South

EXTREMELY RARE
Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

VERY RARE
Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

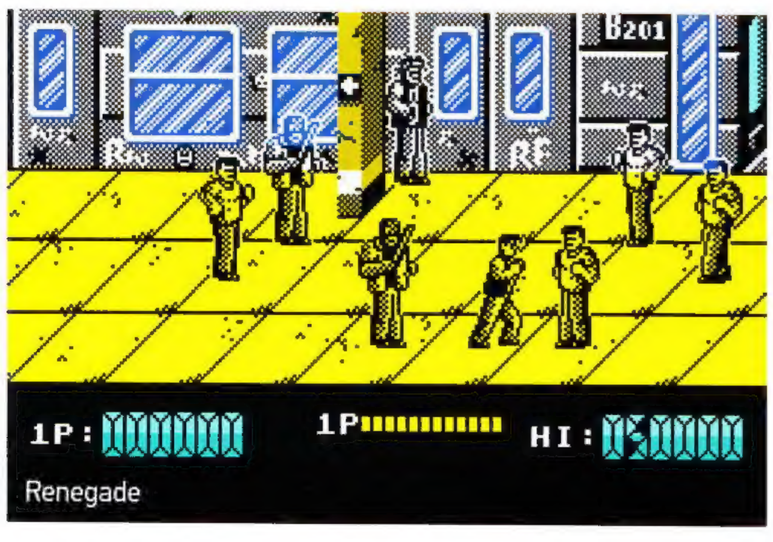
RARE
You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON
You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON
Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON
So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- ☐ Nosferatu The Vampyre
- ☐ Olli & Lissa
- ☐ Operation Thunderbolt
- ☐ Operation Wolf
- ☐ Paperboy
- ☐ Paris-Dakar
- ☐ Penetrator
- ☐ Pentagram
- ☐ Percy The Potty Pigeon
- ☐ Ping Pong
- ☐ Power Drift
- ☐ Price Of Magik, The
- ☐ Pyjamarama
- ☐ Pyracurse
- ☐ Quazatron
- ☐ R-Type
- ☐ Rainbow Islands
- ☐ Raid Over Moscow
- ☐ Ranarama
- ☐ Rebel Star
- ☐ Rebel Star II
- ☐ Red Moon
- ☐ Renegade
- ☐ Rick Dangerous
- ☐ Robin Of The Wood
- ☐ RoboCop
- ☐ RoboCop 2
- ☐ Rock Star Ate My Hamster
- ☐ Rocky Horror Show, The
- ☐ Rod-Land
- ☐ Roller Coaster
- ☐ Saboteur!
- ☐ Sabre Wulf
- ☐ Sacred Armour Of Antiriad, The
- ☐ Satan
- ☐ Scuba Dive
- ☐ Sentinel, The
- ☐ Shadow Of The Beast
- ☐ Sim City
- ☐ Sir Lancelot
- ☐ Sir Fred
- ☐ Skool Daze
- ☐ Slap Fight
- ☐ Southern Belle
- ☐ Space Gun
- ☐ Spellbound
- ☐ Spindizzy



Renegade

- ☐ Splat!
- ☐ Split Personalities
- ☐ Spy Hunter
- ☐ Spy vs Spy
- ☐ Starglider
- ☐ Starglider 2
- ☐ Starion
- ☐ Starquake
- ☐ Starstrike II
- ☐ Steve Davis Snooker
- ☐ Stormbringer
- ☐ Stormlord
- ☐ Strangeloop
- ☐ Stunt Car Racer
- ☐ Super Pipeline 2
- ☐ Sweevo's Whirled
- ☐ Switchblade
- ☐ Swords And Sorcery
- ☐ Tai-Pan
- ☐ Tapper
- ☐ Target: Renegade
- ☐ Tau Ceti
- ☐ Technician Ted: The Megamix
- ☐ Thanatos
- ☐ Theatre Europe
- ☐ Three Weeks In Paradise
- ☐ Thrust
- ☐ Thundercats
- ☐ Tir Na Nog
- ☐ TLL
- ☐ Total Eclipse
- ☐ Trailblazer
- ☐ Trantor
- ☐ Trap Door, The
- ☐ Trashman
- ☐ Treasure Island Dizzy
- ☐ Turbo Esprit
- ☐ Turmoil
- ☐ Turrican
- ☐ Turrican II
- ☐ Underwurlde
- ☐ Untouchables, The
- ☐ Urban Upstart
- ☐ Virus
- ☐ Way Of The Exploding Fist, The
- ☐ Way Of The Tiger, The
- ☐ WEC Le Mans
- ☐ West Bank
- ☐ Wheelie
- ☐ Where Time Stood Still
- ☐ Who Dares Wins II
- ☐ Wizard's Lair
- ☐ Wizball
- ☐ Wriggler
- ☐ Xeno
- ☐ Yie Ar Kung-Fu
- ☐ Zombi
- ☐ Zona 0
- ☐ Zub
- ☐ Zynaps

Collector Q&A

As well as his impressive Spectrum collection, Steve Brown is the founder of the TZX Vault project

What drew you to the Spectrum over other micros?
Manic Miner! I remember going to Blackpool around the end of 1983 and while wandering around a newsagent I saw a copy of *Personal Computer Games* with the mutant telephones screen on the cover. After reading the review, I had to have the game.

Just before Christmas my dad told me I was going to get a computer and wanted to know which one I wanted. Without any hesitation I picked the Spectrum and bought a copy of *Manic Miner* ready to play on Christmas morning. Luckily my dad bought me the 48K model!

When did you start collecting games seriously?
The serious collecting happened by accident. I already owned about 50 or so games back in 2000 when I started the TZX Vault preservation project. Around the beginning of 2001 I started buying games just to plug the gaps in my collection, so that's when it really started.

How many games are in your Spectrum collection?
I've never actually kept track of how many games I have but if I had to guess I'd say 5,000 plus. I've also got over 600 homebrew adventure games.

What is the most you have spent on a single Spectrum game?
I once spent £160 on eBay for *Specvaders* by Hewson Consultants, as it was the last of the original-style Hewson titles I needed.

Have you any collecting preferences or quirks?
I collect games by Mikro-Gen across all formats. Before starting the TZX Vault, I bought some Mikro-Gen games from a local car boot sale, and it made sense to continue collecting Mikro-Gen games as I already had a head start!

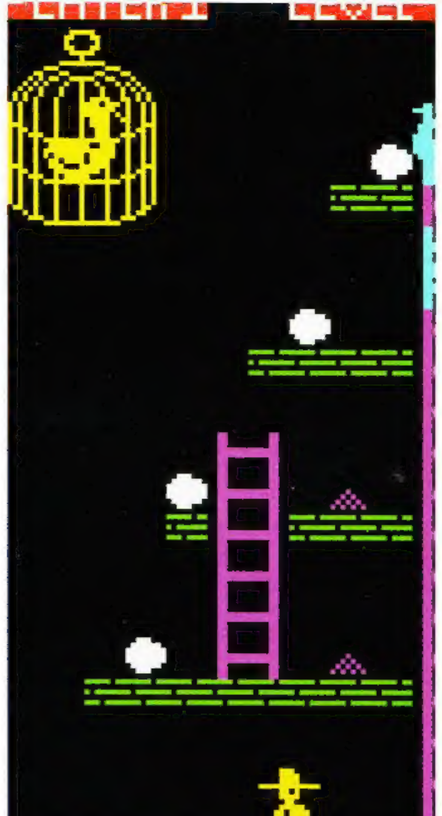
Is there one particular game that is eluding you?
I'm after *Gnasher* by Mikro-Gen for the Spectrum. I have the ZX81 version called *Paint Maze* and the VIC-20 version called *Puckman*, but the Spectrum version is proving to be very elusive. The only mention of it I've ever seen was in one of the early issues of *Crash*, when it was reviewed.

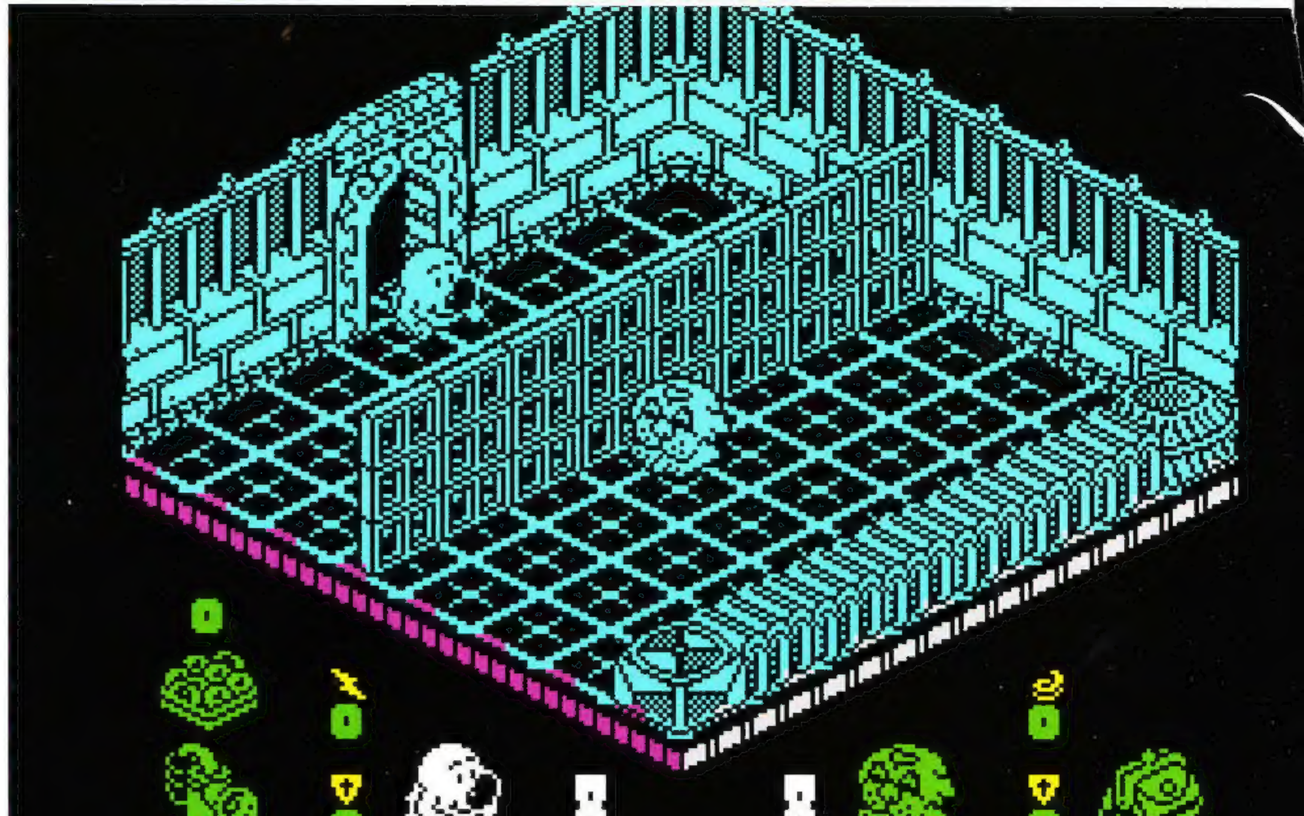
When did you start the TZX Vault project and why?
I began the TZX Vault project in February 2000. I knew of a few existing Spectrum preservation sites, however there was no central repository to store all the preserved material and there didn't appear to be any collaboration between sites, so I thought I'd try and organise the preservation effort. Luckily I managed to get Andy Barker, Paul Hurd, Tony Barnett and Martijn van der Heide on board very quickly, and the project took off from there.

Any advice to new Spectrum collectors?
I'd say either stick with the popular titles or be selective. There are [over 10,000 games] in the World of Spectrum database. It's just not possible to own every single title ever released. I'd recommend going for the top 100 games as voted for by visitors to the WOS website.

HI:

TOP 10 HIGH SCORE
0002000000





OR THE MOONPRINCE
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Central Cavern
Score 000000
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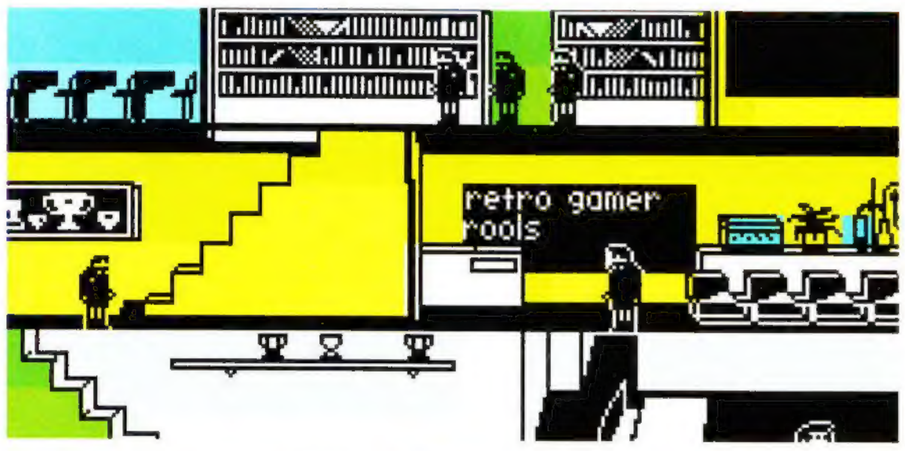
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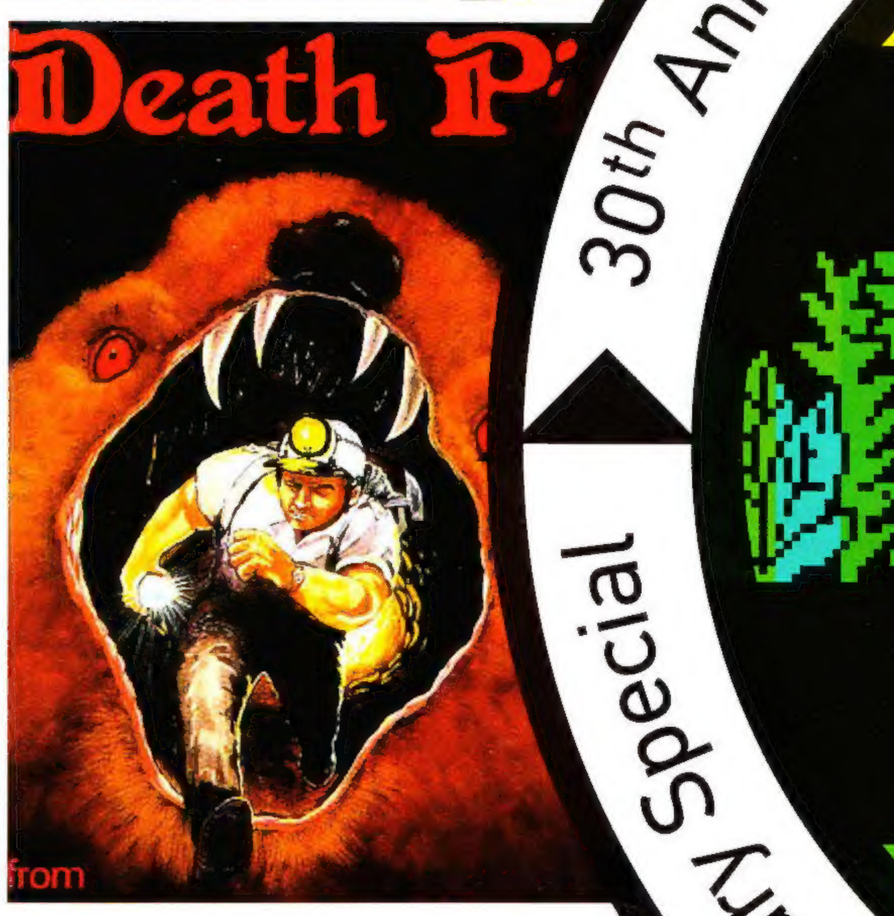
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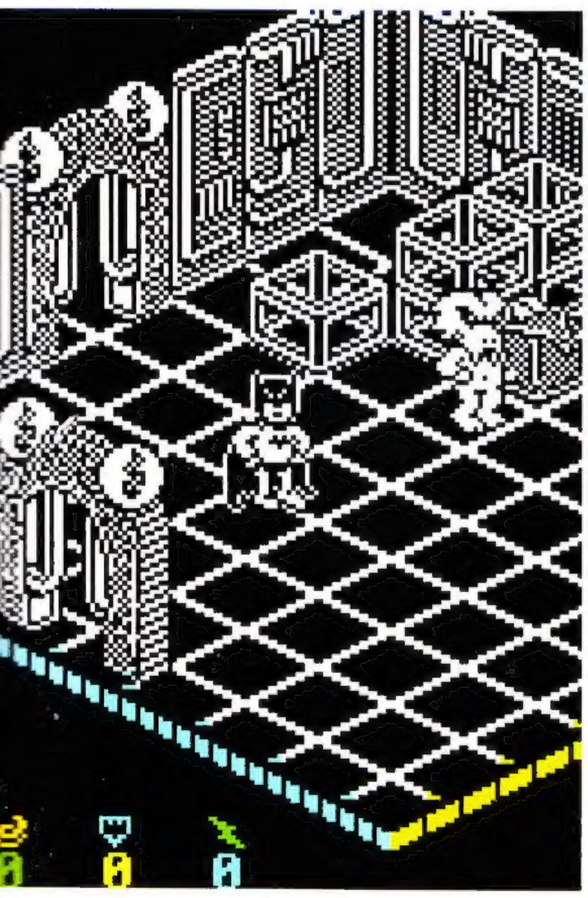

CRASH
No4 MAY 1984
75p
MICRO GAMES ACTION
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WHAT NOW!
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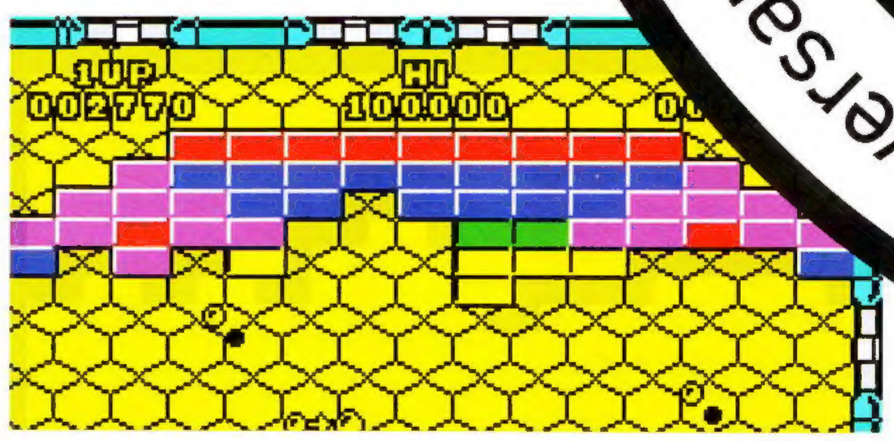
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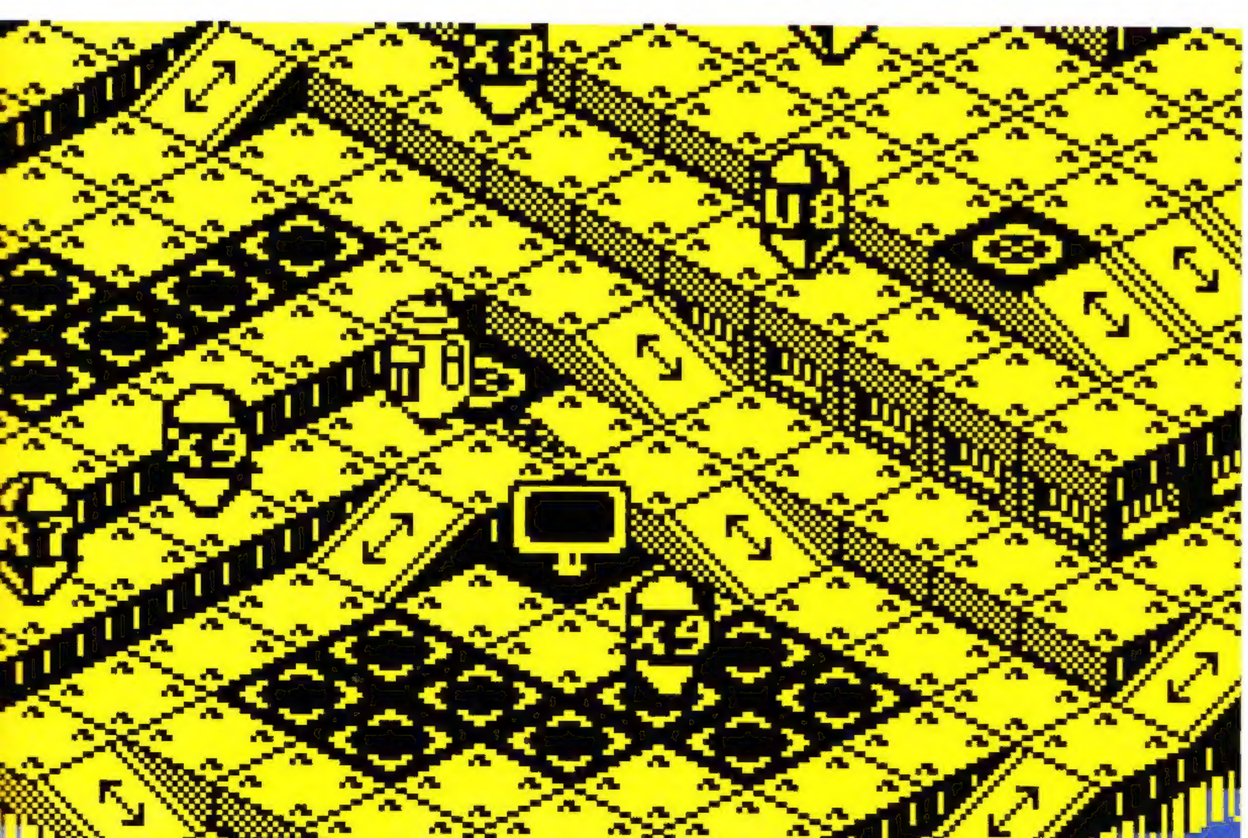

ZX Spectrum
BREAK
SPACE
ENTER